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CHRISTIAN PROGRESS:

A SEQUEL

TO THE

ANXIOUS INQUIRER AFTER SALVATION.

BY

JOHN ANGELL JAMES,

AUTHOR OF "AN EARNEST MINISTRY," "CHURCH IN EARNEST,"
"CHURCH MEMBER'S GUIDE," ETC. ETC.

Forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before. PHIL. 3: 13.

Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord. HOSEA 6: 8.

SECOND EDITION.

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SOUTHERN BAPTIST PUBLICATION SOCIETY.

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TO THE MEMORY OF

William Freeman Lloyd, Esq.,

LATE OF

STANLEY HALL, STROUD,

WHOSE INVALUABLE SERVICES FOR A PERIOD OF THIRTY-SEVEN YEARS IN CONNECTION WITH THE

Religious Tract Society

SO MATERIALLY CONTRIBUTED IN THE DAYS OF HEALTH TO THE PROSPERITY AND USEFULNESS OF THAT IMPORTANT INSTITUTION; AND WHO AMIDST SUFFERING AND RETIREMENT STILL CONTINUED HIS OCCASIONAL EFFORTS FOR ITS INTERESTS,

THIS WORK,

UNDERTAKEN AT HIS SUGGESTION, AND ON WHICH HE BESTOWED SOME OF THE LAST MOMENTS OF HIS LIFE,

Is Inscribed

WITH SENTIMENTS OF MOURNFUL ESTEEM AND REGARD

BY HIS SINCERE AND SURVIVING FRIEND,

THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

The history of this little Work possesses a mournful and solemn interest. It owes its existence to one of whom it must now be said, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them." Some months ago I received a letter from my dear and long-continued Friend, William Freeman Lloyd, Esq., once the invaluable agent of the Religious Tract Society, suggesting the desirableness of some small volume to form a Sequel to "The Anxious Inquirer," and expressing a wish that I would undertake it. At first I put aside the idea as calling for what appeared to me to be superfluous, there being already books of that description even, perhaps, to abundance. It was still urged upon me by my much esteemed Friend, on the ground that the extensive circulation and favor which "The Anxious Inquirer" had obtained, might possibly secure for a treatise written by the same author, and intended to be a sequel to the former, more attention than the productions of some other writers would receive, especially if its title and contents should set forth a connection between the two.

During a season of indisposition, which by confining me pretty much for some days to my chamber or my study, the subject came under re-consideration: I communed about it "with my own heart upon my bed," and also with Him "from whom all good counsel, all just thoughts, and all holy desires do proceed;" and the result was a determination to comply with the suggestion of Mr. Lloyd. The plan was in part drawn, and the general idea of the subject revolved and taken while my head was upon my pillow, and during the silent watches of the night; and my first business on my restoration was to commit to paper the thoughts which had passed through my mind in the season of seclusion.

The work, according to their undeviating plan of submitting all their publications to the careful examination of their own Committee, or to some one appointed by them, was committed by the Religious Tract Society to the revision and approval of Mr. Lloyd, then in retirement through long-continued indisposition. Sheet after sheet had passed under his critical review, till the last, which contained the preface and a dedication to himself, came back with a short note expressive of his gratification that his name would thus be publicly associated with mine. In consequence of an unexpected delay in the supply of paper, the striking off of this last sheet was delayed till the very morning when intelligence of his death arrived, and just in time before the press was set to work, to enable me to pay this tribute of affectionate respect to the memory of one with whom I have been in private somewhat intimately associated, and whom I so much respected for his talents, admired for his usefulness, and loved for his virtues. It will ever be a grateful recollection that *one* of his last, if not the *very* last, of his services for the Society whose interests he so tenderly loved and so efficiently promoted, was to examine on its behalf this production of my pen, and fruit of his own suggestion.

I have determined, that though his decease took place before the printing of the Work, the Dedication which he read and approved shall remain, with only just such alteration as shall make it a tribute of respect to his memory, instead of a token of esteem to the living man.

"The righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance."

J. A. J.

Edgbaston, April 28, 1853.

INTRODUCTION.

THE DESCRIPTION OF PERSONS FOR WHOSE BENEFIT THIS WORK IS INTENDED AND TO WHOM IT IS ADDRESSED.

"If there be one word," says a writer in one of the ablest of our evangelical periodicals, "which more than another now commands the ear of the British public, that word is—'PROGRESS.' It has fallen like a spark amongst the inflammable mass of the working and thinking classes. This mighty watchword of the newest and most potential eras has run through the mighty chain of hearts and minds with electric intensity." This is true of science, of literature, of arts, of commerce, of jurisprudence, and of politics. It would be strange if religion, considered as a practical system, could be justly exempted from this law of progress. We are to expect no new revelations, and cannot look for any new doctrines to be brought out of the old ones. That these however have yet to develope themselves still more clearly; that new treasures are to be brought out of this inexhaustible mine, and a new power to be exerted by this mighty instrument for the world's regeneration, who can doubt?

It is not, however, of the progress of theological science, as it is found in the systems of divines, and as it shall clear away the clouds and mists which hang over men's minds, and hide the glory of the great luminary of the world, that I now write; but

of the progress of truth in the individual mind, and heart, and character; of that blessed growth in spiritual life which is to be the supreme object of every one who has passed through a state of religious solicitude; and which carries forward the soul of "the Anxious Inquirer" to the condition of the established believer.

This work takes it for granted that the reader *has* decided, in his own opinion at any rate, in the great business of religion, to look for salvation by faith in Christ alone. I am supposing that he has been led to this by the blessing of God upon my former work, or upon some other means. It is not my design *now* to urge him to surrender at the foot of the cross to God. I consider this as done. He has also become the *professor* of the faith he has exercised. His difficulties have been removed, his mistakes rectified, and seeing his only way of salvation to be by trust in Christ, he is now to be led forward in the ways of the Lord.

It is the confession and lamentation of the horticulturist that many of the most promising and beautiful blossoms of his trees do not set in fruit: and that many which do, never ripen to maturity. Precisely similar cases occur to the spiritual husbandmen in the garden of the Lord. Where is the faithful minister of Jesus Christ who has not often in sadness and disappointment, to adopt the language, and to sympathise in the feeling of surprise, grief, and disappointment, of the Apostle Paul, where he said, "I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain. My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you, I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you. Ye

did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?"—Gal. iv. 11, 19, 20; v. 7. How often, when through God's grace, as we fondly hoped, we had led the penitent to the cross, directed the eye of faith to the Lamb of God, assisted him in the exercise of "a good hope," and left him in possession of a quiet consciousness of the great change, have we seen him leave his "first-love," and instead of advancing into a fuller development of Christian character, relinquishing the solicitude he once possessed, and sinking into a state of lukewarm indifference!

Of the multitudes who are confirmed in the Church of England, after the greatest pains have been taken, even by the most spiritual and devoted clergymen, to prepare them for that rite, how many are there who disappoint their hopes! They had given to them much sound instruction apart from the design of this ecclesiastical service itself; had explained to them the nature of spiritual religion as distinguished from that which is ceremonial, and laid open to them the only ground of a sinner's hope of acceptance with God in the atonement of Christ; had read the Scriptures to them and explained their contents; had prayed with them and for them; and as the result of all this, had seen their catechumens brought to concern, to conviction, to profession. They have welcomed them to the table of the Lord and rejoiced over them for awhile with great joy as the fruit of their ministry, and the rich and blessed reward of their labors. Alas, the delight was premature, for all this goodness was "as the morning cloud and early dew which passeth away."

Similar disappointments attend the ministers of Christ of other denominations. By their pious

labors, religious concern is awakened in the minds of some of their hearers. Conviction of sin by the law is produced, and the great question with its accompanying solicitude is awakened, "What shall I do to be saved?" The anxious inquirer is instructed in the way of salvation. He professes to understand and receive "the truth as it is in Jesus." His solicitude subsides into peace. He becomes a professor of religion; is received into the fellowship of the church; and considers himself, and is considered by others, a Christian. It might be expected that he would now grow in grace; that he would be continually advancing in the divine life; that his attainments would be always increasing; that *progression* would be the law of his new existence. But is not the contrary to this the case with many of those who make a profession? Do they look like learners in the school of Christ who are making great proficiency in divine knowledge? On the contrary, does it not appear too evident that in many cases, the young disciple instead of remaining the anxious believer and progressive Christian, has subsided into the careless professor? As if their solicitude was to *make* a profession, not to *maintain* it; to be *called* a Christian, rather than *be* one; to enjoy church privileges, rather than to feel individual obligations.

It might seem strange that when a false profession is so awfully denounced, and the Lord's table guarded as if by the flaming sword of a cherub in that woe pronounced by the apostle upon the unworthy receiver, any one should be so rash and reckless as to expose his soul to the perilous stroke of that fearful weapon. Yet many do, by partaking in an unmeet state of mind of the sacred supper.

It will perhaps be asked, Why do the ministers of religion permit it? We reply, Can they search the heart? Can they discern between the sincere and the self-deceived communicant? Is not a credible profession a sufficient warrant to any minister to admit a person to the communion?

In an age like ours, when evangelical religion bears no stigma, and its professors are called to endure no persecution, it is natural to suppose that some, yea many, will say, "Lord, Lord,—who do not the will of our Father in heaven." Many there are who sufficiently feel the obligation to make a profession of religion, who have no just sense of what it includes and requires. The persuasion of friends, and their own wish to be associated with them, may also lead to this; and thus the conscience is appeased, a sense of religious decorum indulged, and pious relatives pleased, while at the same time, there is no adequate idea of the obligation which the assumption of the Christian name involves.

With many persons there seems to be a radical mistake as to the true nature of the Christian life. It is regarded too much in the light of a mere profession, rather than a practice—a state, rather than a habit—a fixed point, rather than a continuous line—a resting place, rather than a field of labor—the goal, rather than the starting point. A profession has been looked forward to with anxiety, as a something which is to fix and determine the character—to give a religious status—to secure certain immunities. The mind in prospect is perhaps somewhat serious, agitated, and solicitous. The table of the Lord is approached, and perhaps with some solemnity and self-surrender. And it is now regarded as a thing *done*. The Christian character is

formed. The mind is at ease. The inward consciousness is, "I am a *professor*." In too many cases, solicitude is from that hour at an end. Instead of a trembling anxiety to *be* all that they profess; to *do* all that is required of them; to develope all that is contained in the Christian character; to supply all the defects in knowledge, faith, and holiness, which might be supposed to exist in one so young in religion; to demonstrate to all around the reality, by the growth, of their piety; they settle down at ease upon their profession, and in many cases are never more in earnest, and in not a few, less so than when they first began to seek the Lord.

But without supposing such extreme cases as these of self-satisfaction in the first stages of religion, there are others of a somewhat more hopeful character, but which still require the cautions, directions, and admonitions of such a work as this. And to put these more clearly before the reader, I may observe there are four successive states of mind in reference to religion: absolute indifference—concern, attended by conviction of sin—faith in Christ, bringing relief to the burdened and troubled conscience—and then the work of faith in its continuous influence on the Christian life and character. I am supposing now the case of one who has reached the *third* stage. His indifference has given place to solicitude, his solicitude has obtained relief by faith. The young disciple has discovered, to his delight, the way of pardon, peace, and eternal life, through the atonement of Christ. There he is, lying down in peace at the foot of the cross. The oppressive burden of his guilt is lost. The tormenting fear which it produced has been cast out by love. He is now ready to say—

"Sweet the moments, rich in blessing,
Which before the cross I spend,
Life, and health, and peace possessing,
From the sinner's dying Friend.

"Here I'll sit, with transport viewing
Mercy's streams, in streams of blood:
Precious drops my soul bedewing,
Plead and claim my peace with God."

All this is well, good, happy—but it is not enough. Even he, this *relieved* soul, is but too apt to forget that he has "not yet attained, and is not yet perfect." Even he is but too apt to consider that the great transition from a state of nature to a state of grace; that the mighty bound from impenitence to conversion; that the wondrous translation from the power of darkness to the kingdom of God's dear Son; is, if not all that is required, yet all that need make him anxious. He is so taken up with his justification through faith, and the peace with God which it brings with it, that his sanctification is too little thought of. He is ready to say of Calvary what Peter did of Tabor, "It is good to be here:" not considering how much yet remains to be done. It is indeed a blessed thing to be pardoned: who can deny it? To look up and see the brow of Deity not clothed with a frown, but radiant with a smile: to see the heavens all serene and cloudless, and to feel the bright beams of mercy diffusing warmth as well as light over the conscience. "Oh, the blessedness of the man whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sin is covered, to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity." But this is not the whole of religion —nor the end of it—nor the highest glory of it. There is the purpose for which this very pardon is granted to be accomplished. There is all the subsequent work of grace, of which this is only the commencement, to be carried on and completed.

O, thou blessed penitent—thou relieved anxious inquirer—thou rejoicing young believer—I would not dash the cup of consolation from thy lips, nor drop into it wormwood and gall. I would not affirm thy joy is premature. On the contrary, I would say, "Rejoice in the Lord, Rejoice in the Lord always." "The joy of the Lord is thy strength." "Go on thy way rejoicing." Yes, but then, *Go on.* Carry thy joy with thee, even joy and peace in believing. But still I say, Go on. Onwards! Onwards, is the Christian's watchword. How blessed a night was it to the Children of Israel when they celebrated the paschal feast on the eve of their flight from the house of bondage. Yes, but they were to eat it with their staves in their hands, and with other emblems of progress. How jubilant were their feelings when they found themselves safe on the farther shore of the Red Sea. Yes, but there they were not to linger, but must move onwards. All the length of the wilderness stretched between them and the promised land. Privations were to be endured; enemies to be encountered; difficulties to be surmounted; and dangers to be escaped ere they could set their foot on Canaan. So is it with the Christian; his conversion is but his flight from Egypt; and amidst all the joy of his first faith and first love, he must be reminded of the journey through the wilderness, and be prepared to make it.

The journey is in fact to the latter what it was to the former—the great test of character. Of all those six hundred thousand who started so joyfully from Egypt only two crossed the Jordan. All the rest found graves in the wilderness. Of those who now seem so hopefully to set out for heaven, and make a good profession before many witnesses, how many

are satisfied with merely beginning well. In them the Christian character is never developed. They make no progress. Not going forward, they turn backwards. Instead of progress it is retrogression with them. They are like evergreens transplanted in the spring, which for awhile look as vigorous and fresh as the other shrubs all around them; but they send out no shoots, though retaining for awhile their verdure. The gardener as he looks upon the plant has his fears, and shakes his head; till as the season advances, the signs of decay are but too apparent, and the leafless skeleton proclaims the work of death. So is it with some who make a profession of religion in youth.

The design of this volume, then, will now be clearly seen, and the persons for whom it is intended be correctly understood. It is a sequel to "The Anxious Inquirer after Salvation directed and encouraged," and takes up the traveller to heaven where that leaves him, and offers to guide him onward in his perilous and eventful course. To change the illustration from the flight of Israel out of Egypt to that of Lot from Sodom, and to connect it with the former work above alluded to, I might say that if the intent and effect of that little work, in every case where it is successful, is to pluck the sinner from the condemnation of the law, and thus to perform the office of the angel who brought the patriarch out of the city doomed to destruction; the purpose of this is to say to the rescued fugitive, "Escape for thy life: look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain: escape to the mountain lest thou be consumed."

ADDRESS TO THE READER.

Before you proceed to read another page, pause, ponder, and examine. Solemnly, as in the presence of God; seriously, as taking up the most momentous subject in the universe; honestly, as wishing to know your real state, ask yourself the question, "Am I stopping in a mere profession? Have not I hastily taken up the Christian name without duly considering what it *is* to *be* a Christian? What strictness and earnestness it implies; what obligations it imposes; what duties it requires; and what progressive improvements it demands? Have I really studied the Word of God to obtain a correct idea of the nature of religion? Of its holiness, spirituality, heavenliness? Do I understand it to be a growing meetness for, and a steady advance towards celestial glory? Have I not concluded I am a Christian too hastily? Or, have I not settled down into a state of carelessness, while I ought to be still in a state of anxiety and effort? Or, supposing I *have* experienced a change, have I not taken up the idea that religion is a state rather than a progress?"

Reader, put these questions to yourself. Be honest. Wish, long, be intensely anxious, to be right. Tremble to your very soul's centre at the idea of self-deception on so momentous an affair. Before you read another chapter, put down the volume, fall upon your knees and agonize in prayer, that the perusal may be blessed to your soul. Take the book with you into your closet. Read it in your most serious hours, in your greatest privacy, and in the most solemn manner. I would recommend these and some such other directions for its perusal as are

found in "The Anxious Inquirer." In books for spiritual edification much depends upon the manner in which they are read. If taken up carelessly and read in a light mood, or in the company of others, they are likely to do little good. The attention will not be fixed, nor the heart engaged, nor the conscience awakened. You must be somewhere alone with God; where you can have leisure and opportunity to commune with your own heart and with him; where you can pause, reflect, and pray, unobserved by a single fellow-creature; where you can stop, examine, ejaculate, and it may be, weep.

You must read this work, if you would get any good from it, in some such serious manner as this. I have been very serious in writing it. It has lain with great weight upon my spirit, and has been the subject of much earnest prayer to God. I have seen much of the evils it is intended to remove, and felt much of the need of some such work. And as every page has been *written* in the spirit and exercise of prayer more or less, so I feel anxious that every page should be *read* in the spirit of prayer. Offer, therefore, some such supplication as this:—

"Father of mercies and God of all grace, since thou hast put it into the heart of thy servant to write this little work for my edification, grant me, through Jesus Christ, my only Mediator and Advocate, the teaching and help of thy Holy Spirit, that I may derive spiritual advantage from the perusal of it. Rouse my too dull and flagging soul to consider the importance of the subject. I give thee sincere and hearty thanks that thou hast awakened in me an anxiety about salvation, and enabled me to look for the mercy of God, through Jesus Christ, unto eternal life. But as the work of grace is only just begun

in me, I earnestly pray that I may be deeply impressed with the indispensable need of progressive improvement. Make me desirous to grow in grace: and may this book, through thy blessing, greatly conduce to that end. Help me to fix my attention upon what I read; to understand what I attend to; to treasure up what I understand in my memory; and to practise what I remember, so that I may have cause to bless Thee that ever this work came into my hand. Thus, while I am thankful for the instrument, thine shall be the glory, through our Lord Jesus Christ: Amen."

CHAPTER I.

THE NECESSITY OF PROGRESS.

All spiritual good things tend to improvement. A right principle must, from its very nature, push outward and onward as long as there is in contact with it anything that is wrong, for there is an expansive power in all truth and virtue. It would be strange if this were not the case with religion. It is with goodness as with money, the possession augments the desire to possess more. So that they who are contented with such a measure of piety as they already suppose they possess give fearful evidence that they have none. And this ought to sound alarm at once in the ears of a very large number of persons. "Is it true," they should say, "that a self-satisfied condition is proof of little or no religion; that a quiet, easy, contented mind, without any anxiety to advance, is an evidence that the soul is not in a good and safe state; then ought I not to fear that I am deluding myself, since certainly I know very little about such a solicitude as this? Have I not, since I made a profession, seemed to reach the summit of my hopes, and settled down into a state of religious competency upon a supposition that I am rich enough already?" It may be well for the fears of some to be thus excited; and that they *should* ask such questions about their real condition. An uninquisitive state of mind cannot be a safe one. It is too mo-

mentous an affair to be treated in this "free and easy" sort of manner. It would be far more rational for a young tradesman just or lately started in life to be careless and questionless about his advance or retrogression, than for a young Christian lately set out on the journey to heaven. "Am I making progress?" should be his inquiry. Just for this reason—*Progress is the law of true religion.* This appears—

First. From *Scripture* COMMANDS. We shall select only a few of the most prominent. How impressive is such language as the following: "That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."—Ephes. iii. 16–19. "That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."—Ephes. iv. 14–16. Read also Phil. i. 9–11; Col. i. 9–11; Heb. vi. 1–3—xiii. 20–21; 1 Peter ii. 1; 2 Pet. i. 5; and especially 2 Pet. iii. 18: "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." May I request you to lay down this volume,

open your Bible, and read these passages, remembering that it is God who speaks to you in every one of them, and commands you to go forward.

Secondly. Consider the *scriptural* ILLUSTRATIONS of the nature of true religion. We take one first from the Old Testament, and a beautiful one it is—the rise and progress of the SUN. "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."—Prov. iv. 18. It is not the glimmer of the glow-worm—nor the transient blaze of the meteor—nor the wasting ray of the taper—but the grand luminary of heaven "coming out of his chamber and rejoicing as a strong man to run a race." And a very beautiful sight it is, to see a soul rising out of darkness, not stopping on the verge of the horizon, but ascending higher and higher: not merely beginning its course and remaining amidst fogs, clouds, and mists, but shining brighter and brighter at every step with increasing knowledge, faith, and love. But is this shining light the picture of *our* path? There is no such command given as, "Sun, stand thou still:" therefore it rebukes a stationary profession. It is a rising and an advancing, not a declining, sun: therefore it rebukes a backsliding state. There may be an occasional cloud, or even in some cases, as of David and Peter, a temporary eclipse. But when did the sun fail of carrying on its early dawn to a perfect day? Be thankful then, for "the day of small things:" despise it not. But be not satisfied with it. Religion must be a shining and a progressive light.

Among these scriptural illustrations there is none more frequent or better known than LIFE. It is scarcely necessary to quote passages, they are so numerous, and so familiar. "He that believeth

hath everlasting life." "By this we know we have passed from death unto life." "He came that we might have life, and that we might have it more abundantly." "Your life is hid with Christ in God." "When Christ who is our life shall appear." Religion is a new, a spiritual, a divine, a heavenly *life:* the life of God in the soul of man. Now it is the law of all life to progress. It is so with vegetable and animal vitality, and it must of necessity be so with that which is spiritual. Mark the new born babe—there is a spark of life, always very feeble, sometimes scarcely distinguishable from death. Yet there *is* life. The babe becomes a child, the child a youth, the youth a man. Life is progressive. Is not this, I say, the selected, the frequent emblem of the Christian? In support of this illustration of progress in religion, we may refer to one of the passages already quoted,—"As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word that ye may grow thereby." Newly converted persons are babes lately born, little infants, feeble in every thing that pertains to spiritual life, yet there is *life.* They are not like still-born children, that cannot grow, but are quickened from a death of sin to a life of righteousness. What is dead cannot grow; as what is perfect does not need to grow. An unregenerated sinner can never grow in spiritual life. He must first be made alive; and when he is alive he must grow. This constitutes the difference between "*living*" in the Spirit, and "*walking*" in the Spirit. There is first the principle of life, then its manifestation in activity. So young Christians are very far from being what they are yet to be, even on earth; as all Christians are very far from being what they are to be in heaven. The

child of God is born to grow as well as to live: and God, who has *ordained* the growth, has provided for it in the milk of the word. The representation of Archbishop Leighton in his exquisitely beautiful exposition of this passage is so striking that I shall introduce a long quotation from it, which no one will deem too long:—

"The whole estate and course of the Christian's spiritual life here is called their infancy, not only as opposed to the corruption and wickedness of their previous state, but likewise as signifying the weakness and imperfection of it at the best in this life, compared with the perfection of the life to come; for the weakest beginnings of grace are by no means so far below the highest degree of it possible in this life, as the highest degree falls short of the state of glory: so that, if one measure of grace is called infancy in respect of another, much more is all grace infancy in respect of glory. And sure as for duration, the time of our present life is far less to eternity than the time of our natural infancy is to the rest of our life; so that we may still be called but new or lately born. Our best pace and strongest walking in obedience here, is but the stepping of children when they begin to go by hold, in comparison of the perfect obedience in glory, the stately, graceful steps with which, on the heights of Zion, we shall walk in the light of the Lord; when 'we shall follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.' All our knowledge here is but the ignorance of infants, and all our expressions of God and of his praises, are but as the first stammerings of children (which are, however, very pleasant both to child and parent), in comparison of the knowledge we shall have of him hereafter, 'when we shall know as we are known;'

and of those praises we shall offer him, when that new song shall be taught us, 'which is sung before the throne, and before the four living creatures, and which none can learn but those who are redeemed from the earth.'—Rev. xiv. 3. A child hath in it a reasonable soul; and yet, by the indisposedness of the body, and abundance of moisture, it is so bound up, that its difference from the beasts, and its partaking of a rational nature, is not so apparent as afterwards; and thus the spiritual life that is from above infused into a Christian, though it doth act and work in some degree, yet it is so clogged with natural corruption still remaining in him, that the excellency of it is much clouded and obscured; but in the life to come it shall have nothing at all encumbering and indisposing it. And this is the Apostle Paul's doctrine: 'For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see, through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as I am known.'—1 Cor. xiii. 9–12.

"And this is the wonder of divine grace, that brings so small beginnings to that height of perfection that we are not able to conceive of; that a little spark of true grace, that is not only indiscernible to others, but often to the Christian himself, should yet be the beginning of that condition wherein they shall shine brighter than the sun in the firmament. The difference is great in our natural life, in some persons especially, that they who in infancy were so feeble, and wrapped up like others in swaddling

clothes, yet afterwards come to excel in wisdom and in the knowledge of the sciences, to be commanders of great armies, or to be kings; but the distance is far greater, and more admirable, between the weakness of these new-born babes, the small beginnings of grace, and their after perfection, that fullness of knowledge that we look for, and that crown of immortality that all are born to who are born of God. But as in the faces and actions of some children, characters and presages of their after greatness have appeared, as a singular beauty in Moses' countenance, as they write of him, and as Cyrus was made king among the shepherd's children, with whom he was brought up, so also certainly in these children of God there be some characters and evidences that they are born for heaven by their new birth. That holiness and meekness, that patience and faith, that shine in the actions and sufferings of the saints, are characters of their Father's image, and show their high original, and foretell their glory to come; such a glory as doth not only surpass the world's thoughts, but the thoughts of the children of God themselves. 'It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.'—1 John iii. 2."

We now, in prosecution of the scriptural illustrations of religious progress, take up the idea of a SPRING. "Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever shall drink of this water, shall thirst again; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."—John iv. 13, 14. Permit me to direct your fixed attention to the beauties of this passage. While the pleasures of the world, "the lust of the flesh, the pride of life, and the lust of the eyes," are but as

drops which excite rather than allay the thirst of the natural man after true happiness, or at best leave him unsatisfied; the grace of Christ in renewing and sanctifying the soul, leads it to the true fountain of bliss, and compels it in the fullness of satisfaction, to exclaim, "I have found it; I have found it." And this source of happiness is not far off, for it is within and not without its possessor. "It shall be *in him* a well of water." He carries the spring about with him. Hence it is said, "The good man shall be satisfied from himself." And it is also *abundant*, an unfailing source, a constant supply, a well ever accessible and never dry. But it is not merely the satisfying but progressive nature of true religion which is here represented. It is a beautiful image—not a stagnant pool, nor a well so deep as that its waters cannot rise; but a spring whose sparkling and gushing ebullitions shall be ever bubbling up, and forming an ever-living fountain that flows at all seasons of the year, in heat or cold, and in all the circumstances of the weather, whether foul or fair, wet or dry. Religion always lives, always shows its beauties, and amidst all changes of external circumstances. But this inward spring of grace in the soul is represented as rising higher and higher, and never stopping till it reaches eternal life; swelling into a stream which refreshes others in its course to eternity, making all around it fruitful and pleasant; just like a river flowing through a country which irrigates the land and covers it on every hand with fertility and beauty.

I ask, Is this descriptive of *our* religion? Do we know anything of this indwelling of the Spirit of God? This inward supply from a divine source of sanctity and bliss? These holy ebullitions of sanc-

tified feeling? This rising up of an inward principle to a divine source, an element of life issuing from the parent fountain, and returning to its primitive source—a something godlike, which aspires to God—heavenly, which aspires to heaven—eternal, which rests not till it has reached the eternal? What of all this is in us? Is it mystery, or plainness to us? It is immensely important that we give ourselves time and leisure to enquire into this matter.

The next illustration I borrow is that which we find in our Lord's language; "The earth bringeth forth fruit of herself: first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear."—Mark iv. 28. This language is rather a description of the growth of grace in the heart, than, like the grain of mustard seed, the advancement of the kingdom of Christ in the world. It is an allusion to one of the beautiful developments and slow processes of nature in regard to vegetable life. How gradually does the principle of vitality evolve, its first germinating being imperceptible to the most observant eye. Yet from that invisible germ, there grows up at length the strong and verdant blade. Then the ear gently and gradually comes forth from its envelopments. This under the genial influence of the heavens and the fertilizing power of the earth swells into the plump, ripe corn, ready for the reaper's sickle. Instructive and beautiful emblem of that more precious seed of the Word of God which is sown in the heart of man by God's regenerating work! It is at first small, feeble, tender, scarcely perceptible, like the first shoots of the grain in the earth. It may be the early impressions upon a child's mind listening to his mother's gentle admonition and familiar instruction. Or it may be a conviction lodged in the soul under

some melting or alarming sermon. Or it may be a serious reflection occasioned by some painful visitation of Providence. God has various methods of entering by his grace into the soul of the unconverted sinner. The seed may lie long like the grain in the earth before any sign of vegetable life is perceptible; yet all this while the vital process may be going on. At length it rises above the ground and growth is visible, which continues till the result already described is apparent. But like that in its earlier stages, it needs the greatest watchfulness and care, for it is peculiarly susceptible of injury and destruction.

The last illustration I take up is that of a RACE. "The most splendid solemnities which ancient history hath transmitted to us were the Olympic Games. Historians, orators, and poets abound with references to them, and their sublimest imagery is borrowed from these renowned exercises. The games were solemnized every fifth year by an infinite concourse of people from almost all parts of the world. They were observed with the greatest pomp and magnificence; hecatombs of victims were slain in honor of the heathen deities, and Elis was a scene of universal festivity and joy. We find that the most formidable and opulent sovereigns of those times were competitors for the Olympic crown. Even the lords of Imperial Rome and emperors of the world entered their names among the candidates, and contended for the envied palm; judging their felicity completed and the career of all human glory and greatness happily terminated if they could but interweave the Olympic garland with the laurels they had purchased in the fields of war." Alas for the littleness of earthly ambition and the narrow range of human

vanity! It is not to be wondered at that an institute so celebrated should be employed by the sacred writers to illustrate the sublimer objects which they had to propose, and to stimulate the desires which they were anxious to awaken. Hence the impressive language of the apostle:—"Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown: but we an incorruptible."—1 Cor. ix. 24–25. No subject could be more familiar than this to the minds of the Corinthians, who were often spectators of similar games celebrated upon the isthmus on which their city was situated, and hence denominated the Isthmian. Among these games the foot-race sustained a distinguished place. To this, express allusion is made by the apostle in writing to the Hebrews, among whom these national festivities had been introduced by Herod the Great. "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith."—Heb. xii. 1–2. Every expression in these two passages is allusive and instructive. The enrolled competitor underwent for several months, like the men who engage in those disgraceful feats, our prize fights, a rigid system of physical training. Hence the expression, "He that striveth for the mastery is *temperate in all things*." The candidates were obliged to keep in the course marked out, and to observe all the rules prescribed; wherefore it is said, "If a man strive for masteries yet is he not crowned except he

strive *lawfully*."—2 Tim. ii. 5. The racers laid aside their garments and ran nearly naked. Hence the exhortation: "Let us *lay aside every weight*—(every unnecessary care, every lust both of the flesh and of the mind) and the sin which doth so easily beset us." The race was carried on amidst an immense crowd of spectators,—hence the language: "We also *are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses*." The prize was merely honorary, consisting only of a chaplet of leaves, which withered ere it was worn—hence it is said, "They do it to obtain a *corruptible* crown, but we an *incorruptible*." How finely does this illustrate that sublime passage in the epistle to the Philippians: "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Jesus Christ. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."—Phil. iii. 12–14. Every term here employed refers to the ancient foot-race, and the whole passage beautifully represents the ardor which fired the competitors when engaged in the contest.

Such, and so impressive, is the description given us by the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures, of the nature of religion; of the Christian life; and it is sufficient to make all somewhat anxious about their own state and to reveal the utter worthlessness and hollowness of the pretensions of many to the possession of true piety. Does not this illustrative figure set forth more forcibly and vividly than any mere language could do, that the Christian life is a state of self-

denial—intense desire—deep solicitude;—of strenuous, unremitted, unwearied action;—and of constant progress? How was the soul of the racer filled and fired with the hope of success? How patiently were the necessary privations borne? How was every muscle strained and the speed quickened to the uttermost by the fear of defeat and the prospect of victory? Reader, whosoever you are whose eye shall wander over these pages, pause, I beseech you, and ponder this subject. This is the inspired description of religion, and must, therefore, be the correct one. Does your religion answer to this? Know you aught of such solicitude for the salvation of your soul, such labor to attain it, as are implied in this representation? Is your religion really a *race?* Does your eye often gaze upon the crown of life, and your bosom swell with the mighty aspiration after glory, honor, and immortality? Oh, do not deceive yourself. Look at this, there is something more than profession here. Something more than the easy and careless bearing of the Christian name which many exhibit.

But it is PROGRESS that the subject now leads us especially to contemplate. The racer was not only in action, but in progress. It was with him not merely bounding off with a vigorous start; nor exerting himself to the uttermost of his strength for a part of the course; but a continual going onwards. Hence the beautiful language of the apostle: "Forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth unto those which are before." One who was running in the ancient race would not stop to look back to see how much ground he had run over, or which of his companions had fallen or lingered on the way. He would keep his eye fixed on the goal and the

prize, and strain every nerve to reach them. If his attention were diverted for a single moment it might hinder his speed and might be the means of his losing the crown. Onwards, onwards, was the mighty impulse which stimulated him in his course. So was it with the apostle. He fixed his eye intently on the prize, and allowed no past attainments as a Christian, or success as a minister, to make him linger on the way. So must it be with us. No measure of knowledge, of faith, or holiness, must satisfy us, but we must be ever making advances in the divine life.

Thirdly. If anything more be necessary to convince us of the necessity of progress, consider Scriptural REBUKES. How often did our Lord reprove his disciples for the infantine feebleness of their faith; and with what just severity did the apostle reproach the believing Hebrews for their want of progress. "When," said he, "for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and have become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat."—Heb. v. 12. Could anything be *more* reproachful of their culpable negligence, their shameful indolence, their voluntary backwardness in seeking after divine knowledge? They were babes when they ought to have been, and might have been, of full and matured strength. They were content with the very rudiments of Christianity, the alphabet of religion. It satisfied them just to have light enough to grope after salvation, and to walk on in dim twilight. Alas! alas! how many are like them. How many are content with the veriest elements of knowledge and experience. Talk with them, observe them years after they have made a pro-

fession of religion, and you will find them possessed of only the crudest notions and the most unsettled feelings. They are no further on in the divine life than they were: yea, they have gone back.

Read also the pungent rebukes of our Lord to the churches in the Apocalypse. He thus addresses the church at Ephesus. "I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil; and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles and are not, and hast found them liars: and hast borne, and hast patience. and for my name's sake hast labored, and hast not fainted." How exalted a character! How rich a piety! How fine an eulogium! Surely there is nothing here to condemn. Yes, there is. Mark what follows. "Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, *because thou hast left thy first love.*" See that. Dwell upon it. No attainments, no eminence, can compensate for a decline of "first love." Christ will allow no plea of extenuation to be put in; much less any defence to be set up. Hence what follows, "Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do thy first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent."—Rev. ii. 5. But perhaps it will be said, all that Christ required in this case was that they should only recover lost ground, return to their former state, and continue as they were. Ah, but what must have been their *first* love, when their *diminished* affection was so great? What must have been their *first* works, when their secondary ones were so *signal*? And moreover the rebuke did not necessarily imply that they *were* to be satisfied with even this. They had declined just because they had neglected to

advance, and it was therefore strongly implied that they must advance in order that they might not again recede.

If these things do not prove the necessity of progress, it is hopeless to prove anything. We should give to them their due weight and act under their influence.

ADDRESS TO THE READER.

You have now learnt from the Word of God, the necessity of progress? What think you of it? Has it ever thus occurred to you before? Does it strike you now? Can you deny or doubt this necessity? Can you be indifferent to it, or trifle with it? Perhaps you have overlooked it. You have never entered into the subject; but have had all your attention directed, and all your solicitude awakened to make a good beginning, a public profession, a favorable start. But is this all that is necessary? Does this answer to the description of religion, as a race, a spring, a growing child, or tree? Can you really satisfy yourself that your religion is real if it be unattended with a conviction that it should be progressive? Do, do study afresh, I beseech you, the representations given in this chapter. Ask yourself the one question, "Am I laying aside every weight and the sin that does so easily beset me, and so running the race that is set before me, as to obtain the prize of eternal glory?" Are you? Is there that intense desire after the crown, that vigorous effort to obtain it, that eager hope to receive it, which shall impel you onward with the speed of the ancient racer? Oh, are you convinced that it is not a faint endeavor, but a mighty con-

flict that must gain eternal life? Are you saying to yourself, "I *must* forget the things that are behind and press towards the mark for the prize of my high calling? I cannot be satisfied to be always as I am. I pant to be holier." Again, I say, pause and pray. Read no more till you have entered your closet, and have put up the prayer of faith for a deeper conviction of the necessity of progress.

CHAPTER II.

NATURE OF PROGRESS.

WHAT is it to make progress in religion? Progress is not only action, but moving onward. A door turning upon its hinges is in a state of motion, but it never advances. A chariot moving upon wheels is not only in action, but goes onward. The conduct of some persons in religion resembles the former—there is action but no advancement: they move, but it is on hinges, not on wheels. They go through, perhaps, even with regularity, the exercises of devotion, both public and private. They may be mechanically exact and punctual, still they do not go forward.

There are two ways of setting forth the nature of progress. *First.* By representing the young convert retaining his first views, feelings, and conduct with consistency after his profession has been made, and then carrying them with him into future life and all its various conditions, scenes, duties, and relations. Life

itself is progressive and ever-changing. Imagine the case of a youth who receives his first religious impressions and assumes the religious character while *at home* with his parents. To prepare for future life he leaves his father's house either as an apprentice or a shopman. In too many cases, a change of scene produces a change of character, and religion, under the influence of the unfavorable circumstances in which he may now be placed, or by the power of temptation, declines, if it be not altogether abandoned. But in the case I am supposing, the youth holds fast his integrity, and amidst irreligious and scoffing companions maintains his steadfastness and consistency. He bears opposition and insult with firmness, fortitude, and meekness. Here is progress. There may be no great increase of knowledge or of holiness, but what he had has been exposed to hard trials and has surmounted them, and this itself is growth, and great growth too. So of a *daughter* who remains at home : her profession may have been assumed when very young, before her heart was susceptible of the corrupting influence of the world. The time arrives when the child passes into the girl and the girl into the young woman. In this transition, when she feels the desire of companionship, when her society is courted, and she is invited to parties and amusements, we often see sad instances of declension. Seriousness is gone, and little else than a mere profession is left. But in the case of real progress, the purpose to serve the Lord is unmoved, the resolve to come out from the world and be separate is unshaken. There is the same earnestness, seriousness, and decision as ever. Company, flattery, publicity, produce no alteration of conduct or character. There is a solicitude not how

nearly she can come to the world and yet not be of it; but how far she may recede from it, without affected singularity, unnecessary precision, or a violation of the courtesies of life. She is the same simple-minded Christian, the same decided follower of the Lamb, amidst the development of womanhood as she was in her teens. *This* is progress, *great* progress. To retain her first love amidst this change of circumstances is advance, because it has been put to a new test, and has honorably passed the ordeal.

A similar remark may be made in reference to the influence of our religion on the different *relations* of life. When young people, who have parents living, are converted to God, it is of course their duty to let their religion influence them as children. Religion is not only to make us better towards God, but better towards man; and he who is really made better towards God will infallibly be made better towards man; and if we are not improved in our conduct towards our fellow-creatures, there is a moral certainty we are not improved towards our Creator. There is progress when the great change is proved by persons being made better husbands or wives; better parents or children; better masters or servants. It is a beautiful growth of godliness, when social excellence and all its blessed fruits are seen springing out of the stem of piety. Oh, to see the prodigal son brought back by religion to his father's arms and home; or the unkind and unfaithful husband won back by his piety to the woman whom he had oppressed and insulted; or the faithless servant, like Onesimus, reclaimed by his conversion from dishonesty and injustice. Show me the professing Christian whose social character is as unlovely after profession as it was before, and though there may be

an increase of knowledge and of some other things connected with religion, *there* is no progress.

Then, when the youth arrives at manhood, and carries his religion with him also into business, and amidst all its cares, temptations, and perplexities, holds fast his personal godliness, and unites the Christian tradesman with the Christian professor, letting his light so shine before men that they, seeing his good works, glorify God, *there* is progress: for alas, alas, how many who while in the capacity of a servant maintain a conscience void of offence both towards God and man, and keep up a regard to the one thing needful, lose nearly all the power of religion either as a principle or a taste, when plunged into the anxieties and snares of trade.

Have not many women, who, while young and unmarried, and unencumbered with domestic cares, were earnest in piety, become careless, lukewarm, and indifferent, when surrounded with the scenes and occupied with the solicitudes of a wife, a mother, and a mistress? This, however, is not always the case, as our biography of pious women can amply testify. It is a beautiful sight to behold the young wife and mother retaining her attention to religion in all its earnestness and spirituality, and thus qualifying herself for her new situation by all the power of that godliness which she gained in single life. Here is eminent progress.

Then what *vicissitudes* affect us in this world. Some are raised to prosperity from low circumstances, and lose their religion by little and little in the ascension, till it is all gone by the time they reach the summit. Rarely has it happened that men have not been the worse for prosperity; rarer still that they have been the better for it. What an advance

in godliness has *he* made, who retains his decision, his earnestness, his spirituality, his humility, amidst the rising tide of wealth, and who is the same man in spirit after his success as he was before it.

And so with adversity, to bear it with meek submission to the will of God; to endure chastisement with all long suffering and joyfulness; to appear cheerful amidst surrounding gloom; hopeful amidst desponding circumstances; happy in God when there is nothing else to make us happy; he who does this has indeed made great advances in the divine life.

But perhaps what we have hitherto considered does not so completely bring out the idea of progress as another method of representation, since it is rather the progress of the Christian *with* religion, than *in* it; the retention and manifestation of piety in various situations, rather than the increase of piety itself. Still it is a necessary and most important part of the subject. We now therefore take up this latter view of the subject.

There ought to be a growth in everything that constitutes personal godliness. And as all true religion is based on KNOWLEDGE, there should be an increase of this. Defects here, as we have already shown, were the occasion of the apostle's rebuke to the Hebrews. The increase of knowledge was much in the apostle's prayers for the churches.—Ephes. i. 17–23—iii. 18, 19; Philip. i. 9; Col. i. 9. In all these passages, to which it is hoped you will turn, you will see how earnest St. Paul was that his converts should advance in knowledge. Apart from, or without this, there can be but slow advances in any thing else. This is clear from the apostle's exhortation, "Grow in grace and *in the knowledge* of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Thus you see

growth in grace and growth in knowledge are inseparably connected. Light is essentially necessary to natural vegetation; so it is to that which is spiritual. Young converts are sometimes so taken up with religious *feeling* and *doing*, as to forget the importance even in reference to these, of *knowing*. By a growth in knowledge then, we mean an increasing understanding of the contents, and their true meaning, of the Word of God: a real advance in acquaintance with biblical truth. Not only an acquaintance with systems of religious opinion, but with the design and meaning of the books, and chapters, and texts of Scripture; an ever-growing disposition and ability to read the Sacred Word with intelligence, discrimination, and self-application.

There are three or four matters which may be considered the very substance of the Bible, and with which every Christian should make himself as familiar as his time and circumstances will allow. *The Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ*, as God—man, Mediator; or "God in Christ reconciling the world to himself," is the grand peculiarity of the Bible. It was dimly shadowed forth under the Old Testament, and is clearly revealed in the New. Christ is the alpha and omega of Revelation. You cannot understand the Bible if you are ignorant of this. The true and proper divinity of Christ's person is the corner-stone of Christian doctrine. Compare Psalm cii. 25–27, with Heb. i. 10; Psalm xlv. 6, with Heb. i. 8; Isaiah vi. with John xii. 37–41; Isaiah xlv. 23, 24, with Rom. xiv. 9–11. Read, also, Matt. xviii. 20; John i. 1; 10–14—viii. 56–58—x. 30—xiv. 8–10—xvii. 5—xx. 28; Rom. ix. 5; Philip. ii. 5–11; Col. i. 16—ii. 9; 1 Tim. iii. 16·

Heb. i.; 1 John v. 20; Rev. i. These are only a portion of the Scriptures that testify the true and proper divinity of our Lord. Do give yourselves time and leisure to turn to them, to study them, to treasure them up in your mind. But it is Christ as *Mediator*, also you are to consider, uniting in a way we cannot comprehend, the divine and human nature in his one glorious person. As Mediator he died in the sinner's stead as his substitute, and by his death upon the cross made an atonement for the sinner's transgressions. How clearly, how gloriously, how unanswerably does the doctrine of atonement shine forth in that wonderful passage, Rom. iii. 24–26. There, propitiation, which is the same in meaning as *atonement*, is declared to be the very end of Christ's incarnation and death. Three times, in the compass of two verses, is it declared, that the demonstration of God's *justice* is the end of Christ's sufferings unto death. The whole gospel scheme is a manifestation of mercy in a way of righteousness. In redemption God shows love to us in a way that eclipses neither the glory of his character, his laws, nor his government. Understand well the design of Christ's death, of that mysterious economy of a vicarious sacrifice—that it was to harmonise the salvation of the sinner with the honor of God, and this could only be done by an atonement. At the same time understand well the doctrine of atonement. This means that Jesus Christ having died in the place and stead of guilty man, it is for the sake and out of regard to his death as the meritorious consideration that God pardons the sinner, and by which scheme of Divine wisdom and mercy, the same purpose in regard to justice and to the maintenance of the principles of moral government, will be accom-

plished as the punishment of the sinner would have done. And it is in this view that we see the connexion between the divinity of Christ and the doctrine of atonement. The sacrifice of one who was a mere man, or a creature however highly exalted, could not be as clear a display of God's public justice as the punishment of the whole multitude of pardoned sinners would have been. There required a sacrifice of a very peculiar nature. Here we have it, in Christ. He was truly and properly man, that he might suffer and die, which God could not do; he was God, and thus the sufferings of the manhood acquired from his divinity a character of infinite merit and worth. For a proof of this doctrine we refer you to Isaiah liii. To the whole Levitical law, as compared with the epistle to the Hebrews, especially to Leviticus xvi., compared with Heb. ix. x. Read also Matt. xx. 28; Rom. v. 9 to end; 1 Cor. xv. 3; 2 Cor. v. 21; 1 Peter i. 18, 20—ii. 24; 1 John, iv. 10; Rev. i. 5. These Scriptures are only a few of what might be selected to set forth the doctrine of the atonement; a doctrine not only momentous as an article of faith, but infinitely precious as a basis of hope.

Another subject which it is immensely important for a young Christian to understand is God's method of bestowing the blessings of salvation upon the sinner—that is, the doctrine of JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH. Who are the persons that will receive salvation, and what is the way in which they receive it? This has been plainly set forth in the former treatise—I mean "The Anxious Inquirer after Salvation, Directed and Encouraged." By the doctrine of justification by faith, we mean, that when a sinner is convinced of his transgression, is truly penitent,

and believes in the testimony of the gospel that "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life," he is pardoned, received to the Divine favor, and entitled to eternal life, not on account of his own sentiments, feelings, actions, or *anything* of his own, but entirely for the sake of the blood and righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ, which are in such sense imputed to him that he receives the full benefit of them as if they were his own. Justification by faith is the answer to that momentous question, "How shall man be just with God?" And the reply is, not by works of his own, but by faith in the work of another, that is Christ. He *must* have a righteousness in which to stand before a righteous and holy, as well as a merciful, God. He has no such righteousness of his own. "*Christ* is the end of the law for righteousness unto him." "He of God is made unto him righteousness." This is justification—the same in substance as pardon,—with this difference—that the word pardon simply expresses only the blessing we receive, while the word justification includes the idea of the way in which it comes to us,—that is, by righteousness. There is also this difference, justification signifies our entrance upon the *state* of pardon or adoption, and can take place but once: pardon may be often repeated towards one who is in this condition of acceptance.

It is of much consequence to a right understanding of divine truth, and to the proper growth in knowledge and in grace, to observe and ever maintain the distinction between justification and sanctification. The fall brought in two evils upon man—guilt upon his conscience, whereby he lost God's

favor, and became obnoxious to his wrath; and depravity into his nature, whereby he lost God's image, and became earthly, sensual, and devilish. To be restored to bliss, in other words to be saved, he needs to have his guilt pardoned, and his nature renewed. This is provided for in the gospel scheme of redemption. By the blood and righteousness of Christ, our sins are pardoned; and by the work of the Holy Spirit our hearts are renewed, our nature changed, and our lives sanctified. The work of the Spirit *begins* in regeneration, and is *carried on* in progressive sanctification. The difference, therefore, between justification and sanctification is very great and obvious, and must ever be maintained in our views. Justification is the work of Christ *for* us; sanctification the work of the Spirit *in* us: justification is perfect at once; sanctification is progressive: justification is before sanctification, and sanctification is the fruit of justification; consequently the evidence of our justification is in our sanctification. All the first joy and peace of the sinner must come to him by justification: but his peace, joy, and bliss as a believer must flow in great measure from his sanctification: justification is in order to sanctification, rather than sanctification in order to justification. These remarks may seem to some to be mere theological technicalities. But they are not so. They enter into the very vitalities of personal godliness. For the study of the doctrine of justification—and it ought to be a subject of study, *deep* study, and progressive intelligence—the following portions of Scripture should be devoutly perused:—Isaiah xliii.; Jer. xxxiii. 15, 16; Rom. iii.—iv.—v.—x.; 1 Cor. i. 30, 31; 2 Cor. v. 21; Gal. ii.—iii.—iv.; Phil. iii.

These are the chief matters to be investigated in perusing the Word of God. Not that the attention is to be exclusively confined to these subjects. Nothing in the Bible is unworthy the attention of a Christian. The ancient and interesting histories of the books of Moses, and the subsequent chronicles of the Jewish nation; the lofty devotions of the Psalmist; the Proverbs of Solomon; and the sublime and beautiful books of the Prophets—should also be studied; for "all Scripture," and this expression refers to the Old Testament, "is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."*

It is not, however, in the doctrinal or historical parts of the Word of God only that the young Christian is to increase his knowledge. In religion there is nothing purely scientific: all, all is practical. Every part is "a doctrine according to godliness." It is declared in the passage just quoted, to be the design of the Bible, "that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." Truth is but a means to an end, and that end is holiness. Every one of us ought to study our Bibles with that prayer upon our lips, "Sanctify me by thy truth; thy word is truth." We should grow in our knowledge of the character of God, that we may resemble it; in the perfection of the law, that we might be conformed to it; in the ex-

*I know of no volume more excellent for a knowledge of the *general* contents of the Bible, and the history of the texts, than "Nichols' Help to the Reading of the Bible," except it be Horne's noble work. But the former is only one small volume, at about 3s., whereas the latter is too large and expensive, except for students or wealthy Christians.

ample of Jesus, that we might be more like it. There should be a conviction that we are not only not yet as perfect in what we do know as we should be, as well as that there is much yet that we do not know. A desire to know *merely* to know, is curiosity; but a desire to know in order to *do*, is sanctity.

There ought, then, to be progress in knowledge. No Christian should be satisfied with mere rudiments. And yet the great bulk seek for nothing more. It is really humiliating and painful to preachers to find how little, in the way of imparting knowledge, is effected by all their sermons. No students seem satisfied with so little increase of ideas as those who profess to be in the school of Christ. Usefulness, happiness, and true religious dignity are thus hindered. And not only so, but religion itself is stunted and starved, and its luster diminished. And even they who *do* read and think, peruse only, or chiefly, the works of men. Never was there an age when Bibles were more widely circulated, and never an age when by many who possess them they were less read. Magazines, periodicals, and books of all kinds have come in upon us like a flood, which in many cases has almost swept away the Bible. After all, it is Bible truth from its own source that is the concentrated nutriment of the divine life; and it will be found that they are usually the strongest, healthiest, and most rapidly growing of the children of God, who live most upon the sincere, that is, the pure and "unadulterated" milk of the Word of God. The works of men are very useful in their place when they lead us to the Word of God; but too many persons allow themselves to be kept away by them

from the fountains of pure truth. For the growth of the church of God generally it needs to be led back more to the sacred Scriptures.

Decision of character must be strengthened. At first many a true Christian is a little hesitating and halting. His opinions are fluctuating. His purposes are irresolute. His steps are faltering. He is timid; afraid of the laughter of some, and the frowns of others. He is fearful of being made the subject of remark, and especially of critical and cynical remark. He cannot encounter reproach; and is not yet bold enough to say, "Laugh on; none of these things move me; my mind is made up." Sometimes he is too regardful of his worldly interests. He is a little too flexible and compliant. He makes concessions which consistency of principle forbids. Companionship has too much power over him. He has not acquired grace yet to assert manfully his independence. Hence he is in great danger. This state of mind is perilous in the extreme. If he do not grow out of *it*, it will grow upon *him*. He is likely to draw back, and to give up all. See, then, the importance of his immediately seeking to grow in firmness, resoluteness, determinateness. This was the first thing which the apostle enjoined next to belief: "Add to your faith virtue," or as the word signifies, "courage:" courage to assert and maintain your principles before all observation, and against all opposition. Put on at once the courage of a hero, and the constancy of a martyr. Prove that piety, though contrary to ambition after military heroism, is itself the most heroic spirit in the world. Acquire more and more of the courage which dares to be singular in goodness. Be more insensible to the world's favor, frown, or smile. Religion does

not encourage or foster a haughty spirit of independence or a total disregard of the world's opinion, but it does teach us so to respect the testimony of the Bible and the dictates of conscience as to disregard all censures or remarks that are opposite to these. The tree in its growth strikes its roots deeper and deeper into the earth, and thus strengthens the hold it has upon the soil, so that it is far less likely to be blown down by the raging winds. In like manner let your conviction strike deeper and deeper into the truth, so as that you shall not be thrown down by the conflicting opinions or the stormy passions of men.

Faith is susceptible of growth. It was the prayer of the apostles, "Lord, increase our faith." And we read continually in the Bible of "strong" and "weak faith." Faith may be considered either as general, or believing the *whole* word of God, which is the faith spoken of in the eleventh chapter of the Hebrews; or particular, as having respect to the person and work of Christ. As regards the former, there is ample room in most minds for growth. Difficulties, after the first impressions and convictions are over, soon arise and present themselves to the young and inexperienced Christian, and often multiply in his path. He is perplexed and knows not how to get rid of them. He is sometimes staggered. His mind is uncomfortable. Now, it is obviously his duty and equally his privilege to put aside these obstacles. Of course he should pray for divine grace, and, in the language already quoted, should say, "Lord, increase my faith." But this is not all he should do. He should read as well as pray. His mind should grow in acquaintance with the evidence of divine revelation. He should pon-

der upon the miracles of Christ and his apostles—the accomplishment of prophecy in the person and work of the Saviour—the history of the Jews—the success of the gospel in its first ages by fishermen, not only without, but against, the powers of the earth—the sublime doctrine and pure morality of the Bible—the lofty views it gives of God, and its correct representations of human nature—the power it has in not only changing the aspects of society, but doing this by the renovation of the individual man—the miserable condition of humanity beyond the range and influence of Christianity, showing the need men have of a revelation—with the pretensions of false religions, proving the expectation they entertain that a revelation will be given. Now all these should become the subject of deep thought and reflection, by which the opposing difficulties will appear light and little. Such studies are too much neglected by many persons, who are contented to take their religion upon trust, or to go on their way perplexed by the flippant cavils of infidelity which are so common in this age of scepticism and unbelief. True it is, that their own conversion ever will be the strongest evidence of the truth of revelation to the great mass of the people; yet an acquaintance with these, its historic proofs, will be of great service, and yield great pleasure in their religious course.

But there must be a deep solicitude to grow in that *special* faith which has direct reference to the Saviour and his work. Christ is the chief object proposed to the sinner in the New Testament. The eye that sweeps round the whole circle of divine truth must rest in him as the center. Faith is confidence, and confidence may be weak, partial, and

wavering; or it may be undivided, firm, and settled. The young Christian, though convinced that Christ is the only ground of hope and the only source of salvation, though upon the whole resting upon him and expecting all things from him, is not yet brought, perhaps, to that full and entire turning away from every thing else, and that full and entire resting on the Lord Jesus which an intelligent and strong faith requires. He looks much to his frames and feelings, and his various experiences; as a consequence, his peace rises and falls on this thermometer. A little more freedom in prayer, or enjoyment under a sermon, or elasticity of feeling in his ordinary course, raises him to the mount; while a little less sinks him to the valley. His opinion of his state is as variable as his emotions, and to a considerable extent is decided by them. Thus, his course is an alternation of gloom and gladness. What does all this indicate, but that the eye is not upon Christ but upon self? What does it prove, but that faith in Jesus is weak and wavering? That the mind does not yet see so clearly his finished work as the ground of hope and source of joy as it should do? The soul is not yet weaned from self-righteousness, but is almost unconsciously to itself, going about "to establish its own righteousness," if not of works, yet of feelings. Now faith will as certainly take us off from dependence upon the latter as upon the former. Nor is this all, for the weak believer is looking about to many other things for strength and holiness, instead of Jesus. It does not yet see so clearly as it should do, that "*He* is made of God unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."—1 Cor. i. 31. Friends, ordinances, self-imposed rules of conduct, are all

appealed to with this petition, "help me." And in proper measure and season, it is quite right to use these helps; but not to the neglect of faith in Jesus. A Christian who has grown in faith has risen above this, and is enabled to say, and to rejoice as he says it, "I now see that all fulness of blessing is in Christ, and that it is from that fulness I am to receive, and grace for grace. I am now weaned from self, and am no longer looking to it for any thing but conviction and condemnation, but am looking wholly and always to Jesus. My justification, sanctification, consolation, stability, and perseverance, are all from him, just as all the sap which supports the life and promotes the fruitfulness of the banch is derived from its vital union with the tree. Being safely built upon him as my foundation, I mingle nothing with his work, and find continual matter of rejoicing. Whatever view I take of his person and work, whether I think of his divinity or perfect humanity; his atonement, intercession, or example, comfort presents itself. Grace has made me willing to live out of myself, upon the fulness of Jesus. In him I have *what* I want, *all* I want." This is strong faith, and what an advance from that feeble, fluctuating confidence which marked the first stages of religious experience. This is true evangelical confidence, to look for joy, holiness, strength; and to look for all from Christ. Then is faith settled and strong when we are brought to say, "For me to live is Christ," or as it might be rendered, *Christ is my life.*

Holiness is an essential part, yea, the very essence, of personal godliness. This was the image of God in the soul of man at his creation, which man lost by the fall, and which it is the design of the work of redemption to restore.—Gen. i. 26–27, com-

pared with Ephes. iv. 22–24. Are we predestinated, it is that we might be holy.—Ephes. i. 4. Are we called, it is with a "holy calling."—1 Thes. iv. 7; 2 Tim. i. 9. Are we justified freely by God's grace, it is that we might be holy.—Titus iii. 7–8. Are we afflicted, it is that we might be partakers of God's holiness.—Heb. xii. 10. The whole work of Christ has its end in holiness. He "loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."—Ephes. v. 26–27; Titus ii. 11–14. It is a very low and unworthy idea of the design of Christ's death, to conceive of it as only intended to save men from hell; to consider it as only designed to save them from becoming prisoners, felons, and from the ignominy of a public execution. His gracious purpose, in addition to this, was to make them sons of God, and bright and glorious resemblances of their divine Parent. Holiness was the bliss of Paradise before Adam fell: holiness will constitute the bliss of heaven. All the inhabitants of that state are holy; all its occupations are holy; all its influence is holy. Hence the indispensable necessity of holiness in the Christian character, and the growth of holiness in the Christian life. But what is holiness? The purification of the heart by the Spirit of God from the love of sin, and the life from the practice of it. But this is only a negative view of it, there is also a positive one. Holiness is the love of God, for his own sake; and of man, for God's sake. It is the separation of the soul from the works of the flesh, and the substitution in their place of the fruits of the Spirit.

—Gal. v. 19–26. It is that blessed work by which the wilderness of an unrenewed heart, where grow the briar and the bramble, the thorn and the nettle, is changed into the garden of the Lord, which bears the fruits of righteousness.—Isaiah lv. 13. It is obvious that *this* is susceptible of all degrees, and therefore of continued increase. One man may be holier than another, and the same man may be holier at one time than another. Take, for example, any one single lust either of the flesh or of the mind; any one besetting sin, and the gradual mortification of that is a growth in grace. If a man have less pride, or covetousness, or malice, or impurity of imagination, than he had at one time, and more of the opposite disposition, there is progress. Now, there is great need to say to the recent convert, "Follow after *holiness*," for he is so likely to be taken up with the joy of pardon and the peace of faith as somewhat to forget the necessity of sanctification. At first his views of sin are both defective and superficial. Many things in practice are wrong which he does not at first think to be so; and of the depravity of his *heart* he has very faint notions at all; while also he sees but little of the exceeding sinfulness of sin in general. He must therefore, seek to increase in the love of God, the hatred of all sin, and the entire consecration of his heart and life to the service of God. While God is calling to him out of heaven, and saying, "Be ye holy, for I am holy," he must reply by sincere and earnest prayer, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me."—Psalm xli. 7, 11. Be not satisfied then without a growth in holiness of which you shall your-

self possess the most entire consciousness, and which shall be equally evident to others. Holiness is happiness, and the more you have of the former the more you will undoubtedly enjoy of the later. Enter more and more fully into the bliss of finding the life of God in the soul continually increasing in vigor and in operation. It is a sign of growth in holiness when the mind is not only more enlightened in the nature, evil, and existence of sin in general; but when we become more aware of *little* sins which did not formerly strike us; when the eye of the mind is more microscopic, and can detect sins which we formerly did not see, and especially when we are more *affected* by them. When also we are more solicitous to find out such unknown sins; when we search for them ourselves, taking the candle of the Lord, and going down into the depths of our own heart to bring to light what we did not before discover, and when not being satisfied with our own searching, we carry the matter to God, and in the language of David pray thus, "Search me, O God, and know my thoughts; try me, and know my ways; and see if there be any wicked way in me." When we are afraid of little sins—sins of ignorance, of inadvertence, and of carelessness; when the soul is so anxious to be holy as that it would not have even secret faults kept within it; when the conscience, like the apple of the eye, becomes so tender that it cannot bear the slightest touch—this, this is growth in holiness. Blessed is that soul which is thus assimilating more and more closely to the image of God.

Spirituality of mind and heavenliness of affection are essential elements in true piety: "to be spiritually-minded is life and peace." And it is also the state and character of the Christian to live with his

thoughts, affections, and aspirations, centering in God and heaven. How strong an expression is that of the apostle, and how little is it known by the generality of professors; "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth, for ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God."—Col. iii. 1–3. Pause, reader, and ponder upon this impressive language. *This* is the mind of a real Christian. *This* is the experience of a child of God. It is to this that renewing grace is designed to bring us. What know you of this spiritual renovation, this strange mixture of death and life in the same soul; this holy paradox? Ah, what! Know and understand that vital piety is something more than an abstinence from crimes, vices, and sins; yes, and something more than the practice of the conventional virtues, not only of the world, but of the church. It is a spiritual, heavenly mind—an unearthly disposition. The thoughts and affections, by a holy spontaneity, rise up and flow to God, like the ebullition of a spring, without external force or instrumentality. Divine things possess an attraction which of themselves draw the soul towards them. There needs not sermons, or books, or places, or occasions, to engage the mind and heart that way. There is an inward taste which, like any other taste, is itself a predisposition for them. The soul, of its own accord, self-moved, self-drawn, goes to Christ, to God, to heaven. *This* is growing in grace, and increasing with all the increase of God; this is walking more and more by faith, when spiritual, divine, invisible objects acquire a greater power over the soul; when there needs but the slightest touch

to set the mind in spiritual motion, and the Christian feels increasingly that his element is devotion, and his native air the atmosphere of piety.

The Christian Temper is one great part of true religion: and by this, as distinguished from what has gone before, I mean the *passive virtues* and *amiable affections* of the heart; or what is called "the meekness and gentleness of Christ." Or to refer to another term so often employed by the apostle, I mean the CHARITY so beautifully described in the thirteenth chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians. It is of immense importance that every one beginning the divine life should study both that chapter and our Lord's sermon upon the mount. These portions of Holy Writ fully and intentionally describe and set forth the *Christian temper*. Young professors, and indeed old ones too, sadly forget that LOVE is the very essence of the Christian spirit: it is the very soul of practical religion—a love that represses the strong passions of the heart and the boisterous conduct of the life—a love that makes us cautious against giving offence, and backward to receive it—a love that renders us forbearing and forgiving—a love that produces a calm, equable mind, and which speaks in soft, kind, and gentle speech—a love that dreads the infliction of pain and covets the communication of happiness. "O divine and heavenly charity, thou offspring of that glorious Being of whom it is said, 'GOD IS LOVE;' thou of whom the Lord Jesus Christ was but an impersonation and embodiment; thou that art another name for the gospel, and the very end and fulness of the law; thou benign and gentle spirit, how little is thy nature understood and thy claims admitted, not only in the world, but in the church; when shall thy

sway be felt by all who profess to bow to thy scepter, but who withhold from thee their allegiance, and exhibit so little of thy rule?" How peaceful and amiable; how courteous and affable; how tender and sympathetic; how courteous and obliging, would this love make us to all around. What lovely specimens of Christianised humanity, and what attractive recommendations of it, would this make us! Here, here, is the spirit in which to make progress. Too many have no idea of the subjection of their temper to the influence of religion. And yet what *is* changed if the temper be not; or of what use is any other change? If a man is as passionate, malicious, resentful, sullen, moody, or morose, after his conversion as before it, what is he converted from or to? "Let the mind of Jesus be in you," said the apostle: and in another place, "If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his." Now, the mind of Jesus was loving, kind, meek, gentle, and forgiving; and unless we have these virtues we have not, cannot have, the mind of Jesus. We must not take up the idea that temper is so constitutional, a thing so unconquerable, that we may as well think to alter the shape and complexion of our body, as to attempt to change the natural temper of the mind. It *can* be improved—it *has been* in millions of instances—it *must be*. We must all of us grow more and more in the "whatsoever things are LOVELY." We must set out in the Christian career with the determination, through grace, to eradicate the briar and bramble, the thorn and the nettle—those lacerating and stinging shrubs—and to plant in their room the ornamental fir, the odoriferous myrtle, and the fruitful vine.

There is perhaps no sign of growth more decisive, nor anything more desirable in itself, than *the union of increasing holiness with a wider view of Christian liberty.* These two are sometimes dissociated, and we see, on the one hand, liberty degenerating into licentiousness, and, on the other, righteousness sinking into bondage. The freedom of the one is privilege in opposition to duty; the thraldom of the other is duty to the neglect of privilege. Many an old, but corrupt, professor has abjured the obligations of the moral law, that he might enjoy, as he supposes, "the liberty wherewith Christ makes his people free;" while many a young one has placed himself in spirit under the yoke of the ceremonial code, and brought himself into a slavery repugnant to the free and generous spirit of the gospel. It is as undoubted a fact that "where the spirit of the Lord is there is liberty," as that there is holiness. Both passages in the same context are equally true, where it is said, "There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus;" but then "they walk not after the flesh but after the spirit." "For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made them free from the law of sin and death." This is in order "That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit." —Rom. viii. 1–4. How beautifully liberty and holiness are balanced in this passage. And how important is the exhortation of the apostle, "Brethren, ye have been called to liberty, only use not liberty for an occasion of the flesh."—Gal. v. 13. By liberty, then, we understand, not only a freedom from the yoke, but also of the *spirit*, of the ceremonial law: the spirit of a child in opposition to that of a slave. In other words, serving God in a spirit of love,

which casts out tormenting fears. Young Christians, who are not yet so enlightened and so settled in what are called the doctrines of grace, or of free justification through the righteousness of Christ, are a long time troubled with a legal spirit. There is a kind of superstitious punctiliousness in little things; things which are prescribed by human authority, or invented by human ingenuity, or borrowed from human examples; but not prescribed by the Word of God. In the early stages of religious experience there is often an unenlightened and sickly tenderness of conscience, an excessive and shrinking sensibility, which not only subjects its possessor to a deprivation of lawful comforts and a large amount of very unnecessary pain, but which also incapacitates him for the vigorous and efficient discharge of duty. A man always hesitating, and fearing, and trembling, lest he has failed to execute in some minute particular the will of God, even when his intentions were the most pure and his efforts the most diligent and faithful, is but ill prepared either to enjoy his privileges as a child of God, or for encountering the various events and changes of the Christian life. He will experience little of that "joy of the Lord, which is our strength," and go on his way in heaviness. He is the last to whom we should look for an illustration of that scripture: "Great peace have they that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them." We should cultivate a filial spirit that shall enable us, amidst our numberless imperfections and failings, all of which must be mourned and resisted, still cheerfully to enjoy our Christian privileges, and to persevere in the way of duty, not doubting that we shall be sustained with power from on high to lead a holy life, and that through the grace

of God, and the merits of Christ, all our deficiencies and errors will be mercifully forgiven, and we shall find acceptance at the last. I know very well that the tendency of many is, in these days, to extend too widely, rather than to contract too narrowly, the circle of Christian liberty; but in these cases, there is a proportionate diminution of holiness. The conduct is as little scrupulous in neglecting the weightier matters of the law, as it is in overlooking the lesser matters of human imposition. There cannot be a darker sign for any person than to be for ever complaining of the strictness of religion, and endeavoring to relax the bonds of spiritual obligation under the notion of enjoying Christian liberty. It is a striking mark of progress in the divine life when we are brought to adopt, in intelligence and good faith, the apostle's rule of conduct for himself: "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient; all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any."—1 Cor. vi. 12. Instead of claiming, as many do, indulgence for acts in themselves unlawful because they are supposed to be beneficial in their effects, Paul was not content even with the positive lawfulness of actions, unless to this was superadded a manifest tendency to the production of good, setting in no case these two qualities of morality and expediency in opposition to each other, much less making the inferior to overbalance that which is of greater force and value; but refusing to take a step when they did not coincide. He did not resolve, "I will perform those things that are expedient though they be not lawful; but I will not venture even upon lawful actions, if they be not expedient." Here is progress, indeed, when with enlarged views

of Christian liberty, there is at the same time an increasing disposition to make that liberty subservient to our own holiness, and also the well-being of others.

Christian activity is essential to Christian consistency. The injunctions to this are so numerous as to be interwoven with the whole texture of Scripture. This is set forth by two very striking metaphors, where Christ told his disciples they were to be "the light of the world," and "the salt of the earth;" than which nothing can be more instructive or impressive. They are to illuminate the moral darkness, and purify the corruption by which they are surrounded. It is one end of their conversion, for no man is converted only for himself. Hence said Christ to Peter, "And when thou art converted strengthen thy brethren." Every truly regenerated person is, and should consider himself, another chosen, appointed, and prepared instrument for the world's conversion. God works by means and instruments, and these are not exclusively confined to the ministers of religion. There are many ways in which every real Christian can, without invading the ministerial office, or stepping out of his place, do good to others. This is required by the law, which commands us to love God, for can we love him and not desire that others should do so too? Equally also by that other great commandment, which requires us to love our neighbor as ourselves; for can we really love him and not seek to do him all the good we can? Read the following Scriptures with great care and attention, Matt. v. 42–48; Rom. x. 6–13—xiv. 7, 9; Gal. vi. 6–10; Phil. ii. 4, 15, 16, 21; Heb. xiii. 16; 1 John iv. 10, 11.

Young converts should have a clear understanding,

a deep conviction, and a very powerful impression of this, that they are called not only to holiness and happiness, but also to *usefulness;* and should also perceive that no small part of the two first depends upon carrying out the last. Yet they are not always so disposed. They are sometimes so much taken up with the enjoyment of their own personal religion and Christian privileges, as to sit down in luxurious ease and indolently enjoy the happiness to which they are brought. But let them know and remember, that one of the strongest evidences of our own salvation, is a deep concern and a vigorous activity for the salvation of others. Every true believer should begin his religious course with an intelligent purpose to lay himself out for usefulness, according to his abilities, his means, his situation, his resources, and his opportunities. He cannot be a Christian, who, in the spirit of the first murderer, asks, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Benevolence must enter very largely into the constitution of every real Christian. And like every other part of the Christian character, it must be ever growing. He must be useful, and do good as a young man, with even limited means and opportunities. He must first be active in that way to which he is most adapted. Then he must look out for something else; for nothing is so suggestive and inventive as benevolence. His sphere of activity must continually widen, as his experience becomes established, his knowledge increases, his observation extends, and his resources accumulate. Nothing progresses more rapidly in a heart set upon doing good, than an ability to be useful. They who at first are timid, shy, awkward, in such efforts, soon acquire courage, expertness, and efficiency. It is a sad sight to see

the heart contracting, the hand growing slack, and the foot heavy and slow, as the means and opportunity for doing good are multiplied. On the other hand, how beautiful a scene is it to witness the professor becoming more and more both of the Christian and of the philanthropist, as years roll on; till he realizes the description of the Psalmist, where he says, the righteous "shall bring forth fruit in old age, they shall be fat and flourishing."—Psalm xcii. 14.

And what is the crowning grace, the finishing stroke of beauty, and the brightest ray of glory in the Christian character? HUMILITY. "It is this among other things, and high among them too, which distinguishes Christianity from all the wisdom of the world both ancient and modern, not having been taught by the wise men of the Gentiles, but first put into a discipline, and made part of religion, by our Lord Jesus Christ; and who chiefly proposes himself as our example, by exhibiting in his own perfect character the twin sisters of meekness and humility. Everything,—our ignorance, our weakness, our sins, and our follies prescribe to us, that our proper dwelling place is low in the deep valley of humility. We have only to compare our present spiritual condition, I will not say with the holy God, the holy Jesus, or the holy angels, but with holy Adam before his fall, to see how low we have sunk, and how entirely by the fall we have lost all ground and all excuse for pride. We have only to look at human nature in general—all corrupt as it is—or study it in our own selves as its epitome; we have only to look back at what we were before conversion, or too look in and see how imperfect even in our converted state we still are; we have

only to consider how strong are our resolutions, and how feeble and broken have been their performance; how many the temptations by which we have been assailed, and with what success against ourselves, to see most abundant cause for humility. You may read for injunctions to this virtue—Prov. xv. 33 —xviii. 12—xxii. 4; Mic. vi. 8; Luke xiv. 11; Col. iii. 12; 1 Peter, v. 5. But all these injunctions and all possible motives to this grace are bound up in the example of our Lord Jesus Christ. Remember that the blessed Saviour hath done more to prescribe, and transmit, and secure *this* grace, than any other; his whole life being a great, continued descent from the glorious bosom of his Father, to the womb of a poor maiden; to the form of a servant; to the likeness and miseries of sinful flesh; to a life of labor; to a state of poverty; to a death of malefactors; to the grave of death; and to the intolerable calamities which we deserved; and it were a good design, and yet but reasonable, that we should be as humble in the midst of our greatest imperfections and basest sins, as Christ was in the midst of his fullness of the Spirit, great wisdom, perfect life, and most admirable virtues."*

The same author has given us the following *signs* of humility. "If you would try how your soul grows, you shall know that humility, like the root of a goodly tree, is thrust very far into the ground, by these goodly fruits, which appear above ground. 1. The humble man trusts not to his own discretion, but in matters of concernment relies rather upon the judgment of his friends, counsellors, or

* Bishop Jeremy Taylor.

spiritual guides. 2. He does not pertinaciously pursue the choice of his own will, but in all things lets God choose for him, and his superiors in those things which concern them. 3. He does not murmur against commands. 4. He is not inquisitive into the reasonableness of indifferent and innocent commands, but believes their command to be reason enough in such cases to exact his obedience. 5. He lives according to a rule, and with compliance to public customs, without any affectation or singularity. 6. He is meek and indifferent in all accidents and chances. 7. He patiently bears injuries. 8. He is always unsatisfied in his own conduct, resolutions, and counsels. 9. He is a great lover of good men, and a praiser of wise men, and a censurer of no man. 10. He is modest in his speech, and reserved in his laughter. 11. He fears, when he hears himself commended, lest God make another judgment concerning his actions, than men do. 12. He gives no pert or saucy answers, when he is reproved, whether justly or unjustly. 13. He loves to sit down in private, and, if he may, he refuses the temptation of offices and new honors. 14. He is ingenuous, free, and open, in his actions and discourses. 15. He mends his fault, and gives thanks, when he is admonished. 16. He is ready to do good offices to the murderers of his fame, to his slanderers, backbiters, and detractors, as Christ washed the feet of Judas. 16. And is contented to be suspected of indiscretions, so before God he may be really innocent, and not offensive to his neighbor, nor wanting to his just and prudent interest."

Such is the grace, and such its signs, in which it is the duty of every Christian to be continually progressing. It is not unfrequently the case that

young converts in the ardor of their first love are self-confident, and sometimes a little high-minded. They are unduly exalted in their own estimation by the strength of their feelings and the liveliness of their frames, and are almost ready to wonder at, and to censure, the lowly confessions of others far older in the Divine life than themselves. They seem already to realise, in their own estimation, the beautiful language of the prophet, and mount up with wings as eagles; they run and are not weary, and walk and are not faint. Their spiritual pride, like the fly or the worm striking the young germination, eats into the heart of the young believer, and where it does not destroy the principle of life, sadly impairs its growth.

Let, therefore, the early professor be duly aware of this tendency and watch against it. Let him recollect that as humility may be, and has been, compared to the roots of the tree, while other graces are its fruits; the latter must be expected in abundance only as the former strike downwards deeper and deeper into the earth. Surely it might be supposed there is no one grace in which the soul would be more disposed or find it easier to grow than this, since every day as it passes gives us greater and greater knowledge of ourselves and shows us how little cause there is for pride. "If we need any new incentives to the practice of this grace, I can say no more, but that humility is truth, and pride is a lie: that the one glorifies God, the other dishonors him; humility makes men like angels, pride makes angels to become devils; that pride is folly, humility is the temper of a holy spirit and excellent wisdom; that humility is the way to glory, pride to ruin and confusion: humility makes saints on earth, pride

undoes them: humility beatifies the saints in heaven, and 'the elders throw their crowns at the foot of the throne;' pride disgraces a man among all the societies of earth: God loves one, and Satan solicits the cause of the other, and promotes his own interest in it most of all. And there is no one grace, in which Christ propounded himself imitable so signally as in this of meekness and humility: for the enforcing of which he undertook the condition of a servant, and a life of poverty, and a death of disgrace; and washed the feet of his disciples, and even of Judas himself, that his action might be turned into a sermon to preach this duty, and to make it as eternal as his own story." And can we present for ourselves a more appropriate and beautiful prayer than that with which Bishop Taylor closes his "Considerations upon Christ's Humility:"—

"O holy and eternal Jesus, who wert pleased to lay aside the glories and incomprehensible majesty, which clothed thy infinity from before the beginning of creatures, and didst put on a cloud upon thy brightness, and wert invested with the impure and imperfect broken robe of human nature, and didst abate those splendors which broke through the veil, commanding devils not to publish thee, and men not to proclaim thy excellences, and the apostles not to reveal those glories of thine, which they discovered encircling thee, upon Mount Tabor, in thy transfiguration, and didst, by perpetual homilies, and symbolical mysterious actions, as with deep characters, engrave humility into the spirits of thy disciples, and the discipline of Christianity; teach us to approach near to these, thy glories, which thou hast so covered with a cloud, that we might, without amazement, behold thy excellences;

make us to imitate thy gracious condescensions; take from us all vanity and fantastic complacencies in our own persons or actions; and, when there arises a reputation consequent to the performance of any part of our duty, make us to reflect the glory upon thee, suffering nothing to adhere to our own spirits but shame at our own imperfection, and thankfulness to thee for all thy assistance; let us never seek the praise of men from unhandsome actions, from flatteries and unworthy discourses, nor entertain the praise with delight, though it proceed from better principles; but fear and tremble, lest we deserve punishment, or lose a reward, which thou hast deposited for all them that seek thy glory, and despise their own, that they may imitate the example of their Lord. Thou, O Lord, didst triumph over sin and death; subdue, also, my proud understanding, and my prouder affections, and bring me under thy yoke; that I may do thy work, and obey my superiors, and be a servant of all my brethren in their necessities, and esteem myself inferior to all men by a deep sense of my own unworthiness, and in all things may obey thy laws, and conform to thy precedents, and enter into thine inheritance, O holy and eternal Jesus. Amen."

And now, we may ask, Are there not certain points of resemblance between natural growth and progressive holiness, which deserve notice? We apprehend there are, and principally the following:—

1. It is the order of the natural world for all life, whether in vegetables, brutes, or human beings, to grow. Growth, as we have said, is the law of healthful life.

2. Growth is dependant upon means used to promote it. The child grows in strength and stature

by his mother's milk; animals in much the same way; and trees and vegetables by all the processes and supplies of agriculture and the influences of the heavens and the soil. So is it with religion in the soul: there cannot be advance without the appropriate means, both in kind and measure. These will be the subject of the next chapter.

3. Growth in other things is proportionate in all the parts which belong to them. If of a tree, the roots, stem, and branches all grow together, if the tree be in a sound state. If it be a child, all the limbs grow proportionately, and the body, and also mind, keep pace with each other. Disproportion produces monstrosities. If, for instance, the head be *larger* than the body, or the limbs *smaller;* or if the mind is childish while the body is advancing to the period of youth or manhood, in either of these cases there is deformity. So it is in religion. The Christian grows in knowledge, faith, and holiness together. There is, or should be, no *spiritual* deformity or monstrosity.

4. Growth is very gradual in *all* life, not excepting the Christian. No plant becomes a tree, no child a man, all at once: so is it with the Christian.

5. Growth is perceptible, not, indeed, in its principles, but in its effects. In the case of a tree or shrub, he who sees it when first planted, and looks at it some years afterwards, will perceive progress. So of a new-born babe, growing into a child of two years' old. So of a young convert, he who converses with him at his first awaking, and a year or two after his conversion, will perceive an increase of knowledge, and decision, and comfort, and holiness. This, however, will sometimes be more clearly perceived by those who stand by, than by the Christian himself.

The child is not at the time sensible of his own growth: and it often, yea generally, requires to look back and compare what he is now with what he recollects himself to have been, to convince him of his growth. And so it is with the spiritual babe.

"A healthy child," says Dr. John Brown, in his admirable exposition of the epistle of Peter, to which I am indebted for several of the preceding remarks, "grows without thinking much about its growth. It takes its food and exercise, and finds that it is growing in the increase of its strength, and its capacity for exertion. And an analogous state is, I believe, the healthiest state of the spiritual new-born bade. While self-examination, rightly managed, is very useful, a morbid desire of the satisfaction of knowing that we are improving is in danger of drawing the mind away from the constant employment of the means of spiritual nourishment aud health. The best state of things is where, in the healthy vigorous state of the spiritual constitution, ready for every good work, we have the evidence in ourselves that we are growing; and when that is wanting, application to the sincere milk of the word will do a great deal more than poring into ourselves to find either proof that we are growing or not growing."

This is very true, very judicious, and very important: but then it must not be abused and allowed to degenerate into an utter carelessness about our spiritual state, nor abate that holy jealousy over ourselves, and that just anxiety to grow in grace, without which declension, and not progress, will be our condition. It is quite true that our chief solicitude should be not to neglect, but diligently to use, all the means of progress, rather than an attempt, as by a spiritual pedometer, to be perpetually measuring

the ground over which we have passed. A child who does not grow, who finds his years rolling on and adding nothing to his stature, soon becomes anxious about it, and inquires into the cause of his remaining in his dwarfish littleness. And when, therefore, the child of God, or one that professes to be such, makes no advance, perceptible either to himself or others, it is quite time for him to begin to be anxious, to inquire what has stopped his progress, and to apply afresh to all the appointed means for his spiritual advancement.

ADDRESS TO THE READER.

You now see what is meant by progressive religion. You cannot be ignorant of this important subject, nor plead ignorance for the neglect of it. You see clearly it is not merely an uninterrupted round of ceremonial observances; nor merely an acquisition of knowledge, though these things, may comport with it, but that it is an advance in faith and holiness. Do you understand this matter, and apprehend clearly its *nature* as well as its necessity? Does that one impressive word *growth*, *growth*, stand out clearly defined, luminously seen, impressively felt, before you? If so, immediately enter upon a course of self-scrutiny—diligent, impartial, close examination: to ascertain if there *be* this progress in you. Again enter into your closet, shut the door, and commune both with your own heart and with God, and say, as in his sight—

Am I as really in earnest as I once was?

I have changed my situation, do I retain my religion, and have I carried into new circumstances and relations my former earnestness?

Am I advancing in my knowledge of the Scriptures and the great truths of religion, gaining clearer and more distinct apprehensions of spiritual things?

Am I more decided, and resolute, and settled, in all my religious convictions and pious habits, than I was at first?

Is my faith stronger and more influential, and am I less troubled with doubts and fears than I was?

Am I really holier than I was? Have I gained greater power over my corruptions?

Am I more spiritual and heavenly, more full of devout thoughts and affections?

Do I improve in my temper by becoming more meek, gentle, forgiving, and kind?

Have I learned to combine more of the generous and free spirit of Christian liberty with an equal advance in holiness?

Am I more anxious about universal and unvarying consistency of conduct?

Is it more and more my concern to be active and useful?

Withal, do I increase in humility? Have I a deeper and deeper sense of my own shortcomings, and a growing disposition to think better of others, and lowlier of myself?

Test yourself, very searchingly, by such questions as these.

CHAPTER III.

THE MEANS OF PROGRESS.

This is of unspeakable importance. I *will* suppose that some by the reading of the foregoing pages begin to see this subject in a light in which they never saw it before. I *will* suppose that a new anxiety has come up in the mind now the old one is allayed, and that the great question at present is not, "What shall I do to be saved?" but "What shall I do to be sanctified?" We have already said that means must be used. But *what* means?

1. There must be *a deep conviction of the necessity and importance of progress, and an intense desire to attain it.*

The subject must lay hold of the mind and possess the heart. Will a man increase in knowledge, in wealth, in influence, who has no desire after it? What object ever was or can be obtained without a conviction of its value or a wish to secure it? Is it not the desire that originates the effort, and will not exertion ever be in proportion to the *intensity* of desire? What prodigious and wonderful efforts have men put forth after an object upon which their hearts were set? Look at the tradesman: how will he toil, rising up early and sitting up late, and eating the bread of carefulness to increase his trade. Look at the student panting after knowledge: how will he consume his days and trim his midnight lamp to increase his scientific stores. Look at the hero: braving all the dangers of the field, and the hardships of the campaign, to increase his fame and

to acquire glory—which is but the name vanity turned into an idol. Why, why all this intense energy? Because they have a deep, but mistaken sense of the importance of the object of pursuit, and an absorbing and overheated desire to possess it. And on the contrary, why is it that so few professing Christians do not make progress, and indeed make no efforts to obtain it? Why? Because they care nothing about it. To take up a profession is all they desire—but to proceed from one degree of piety to another—to grow in grace—to go on unto perfection—is no part of their ambition. How many are there to whom if we were to say, "Well, now you call yourself a Christian, and wish others to consider you as such, and you are of course eagerly desirous of making continual advances in knowledge, faith, and holiness; and we shall see you evidently becoming more and more like Christ:" —who, I say, if we should thus address them, would look wonderingly in our face as if they did not comprehend our meaning; or reproachfully, as if we questioned their sincerity; or contemptuously, as if we were indulging in enthusiasm, or mysticism, and wished them to be as visionary as ourselves. Of course such a frame of mind, and such views as these, are adverse to all progress. There must then be concern about the matter. And *shall* there be none? What, no solicitude to have more of the knowledge of truth, of faith in Christ, of likeness to God, of meetness for heaven! No desire to advance in such things! Is it possible to be a Christian and yet destitute of this? No, it is not. I tell you, it is not. If you have no concern to grow, there is no life in you. You are a piece of dead wood, and not a living branch: a spiritual corpse, and not a

living man. In this state there can be no growth, for dead things never grow. While on the other hand, the very desire will ensure the possession of its object.

2. You must enter deeply into that beatitude of our Lord, which says, "*Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness:* for they shall be filled."—Matt. v. 6. This is a passage too much overlooked and forgotten by most professing Christians. Its terms are exceedingly strong, its sentiment amazingly important. Among all the appetites of our animal nature none is so strong—none so imperiously demands supply—none so constantly returns—none inflicts such suffering when not supplied, as this of hunger and thirst. And *this* is the appetite which, in the figurative language of Scripture, is selected to express the vehement desire we should feel after righteousness or holiness: and it is not only *one* of our natural instincts of this kind, but both hunger and thirst, that are spoken of. It is not the faint and feeble desire which by one filled almost to repletion is felt after some luxury, which, if it be not obtained, the person can do very well without. Oh, no; but the insatiable, unappeasable desire of the empty, hungry stomach, after necessary food, that is employed. Such should be the longing of every renewed soul after holiness. Righteousness should be to it that which is bread is to the body, and in reference to which we should say, "Evermore give us this bread." Instead of those longings after earthly blessings which characterize the worldly mind —those pantings after wealth, honor, and pleasure, which excite such energies and call forth such activities, the mind of the believer should be intent on spiritual blessings. No measure of holiness to which

he has already attained should satisfy him. There are sins yet to be mortified, and he must not be content till they are dead. There are heights of moral excellence above him which he has not reached, and he should long to climb up to them. What he has yet attained to are but as crumbs to a hungry man, who longs for the full meal, or drops of water to a thirsty one, who pants for the copious draught. It is astonishing and affecting to see with what low degrees of righteousness some professors are satisfied. How little they seem to have of the *spirit* of holiness. How very little is there of forgetting the things that are behind, and pressing forward to greater things yet! How many are there who are contented with the average piety of the church and the age, and seem only anxious to stand well in the estimation of their fellow-Christians who are no better than themselves. How few are there whom nothing can satisfy but an ever-growing conformity to the divine image!

Perhaps there is in some persons a sad disposition to pervert and abuse a passage of most instructive, and encouraging, and cautionary import: I mean the question which was asked concerning the small beginnings in the erection of the second temple at Jerusalem, "Who hath despised the day of small things?'—Zech. iv. 10. This has been applied also in a spiritual way to the commencement of religion in the soul; and we are told that little grace is better than none at all: that faith is still faith though it be weak, just as diamonds are diamonds and gold is gold, though it be in small pieces. Or, to return to the idea already dwelt upon, life is life though it be but that of a babe, and therefore is not to be despised. We know it and admit it. But then

if little things are not to be despised, ought *great* ones to be so treated? And is not satisfaction with little things, when great ones *may* be obtained, to despise the latter? Be it so, that fragments of gold and diamonds are not to be rejected, yet who are contented with the dust of either when they might have ingots of the one, or large and costly jewels of the other? No; the least measure of holiness is *not* to be despised. It contains a powerful principle of expansion and enlargement. Does the gardener despise the germ of the flower, or the seed of a plant, or the acorn of the oak? Or does the parent despise the day of small things in the life of his babe? No; but then neither the gardener, nor the parent, is satisfied with the day of small things. So neither should the Christian. It is well, therefore, to consider, as Barnes, the commentator, remarks, that there is no piety in the world which is not the result of cultivation, and which cannot be increased by the degree of care and attention bestowed upon it. No one becomes eminently pious, any more than any one becomes eminently rich or learned who does not *intend* it; and ordinarily men are, in religion, *what* they intend to be. They have about as much religion as they wish, and possess about the characters which they *design* to possess. When men reach extraordinary elevations in religion, like Baxter, Payson, and Edwards, they have gained only what they *meant* to gain; and the gay and worldly professors of religion, who have little comfort and peace, have in fact the characters which *they* designed to have.

3. *Great attention to self-cultivation* spiritually considered, is a means of growth. By this I mean what is expressed in one or two passages of Scripture; such, for instance, as the exhortation, "Keep

thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life."—Prov. iv. 23. It is the heart, the great vital spring of the soul—the fountain of actions—the centre of principle—the seat of motives; the heart, where are the thoughts and feelings out of which conduct comes. It is this that must be the first, chief, constant object of solicitude to the Christian. It is this which God sees, and as God sees it, and because God principally looks at it, that must be ever uppermost in our concern. To keep the heart must mean exerting ourselves with great earnestness, in dependence upon Divine grace, to preserve it in a good state: laboring to preserve its vitality, vigor, and purity. We must often ask the question, "*In what state is my heart?* Are my thoughts and affections in a good spiritual condition." It is, in another view of it, the citadel of the soul: if this be neglected, the enemy at the gates will soon be in and take possession. Set a watch, therefore, upon the heart. Let the sentinel be never off duty, nor sleeping at his post. Keep out evil thoughts, and unholy affections, and vile imaginations. Without great vigilance they will elude observation. As soon as an enemy of this kind is detected, he must be seized and made captive, till every thought is brought into subjection to Christ. As the state of the heart is, so is the man in reality, and before God. Discipline the heart then.*

But there is a second passage well worthy the attention of all young converts, I mean where Paul exhorts Timothy thus, "Exercise thyself unto godliness."—1 Tim. iv. 7. The word in the original is very strong, and might be rendered by a free trans-

* On this subject see an admirable volume lately published, entitled "Heart Discipline," by my friend, the Rev. James Cooper.

lation, "practise gymnastic exercises in religion," like the ancient competitors in the Olympic games. We say also of soldiers in the early stage of their training, "they are practising their *exercise*." They are being trained in what they do not previously know, and cannot perform without being taught; and to learn which, and do it well, requires a great deal of labor. So it is with the Christian, he must in all that concerns true godliness, *learn his exercise*, and be often thus engaged. Religion and religious progress cannot be acquired without great pains. As a man cannot be at once a good soldier, while he is a young recruit, and before he has been drilled upon the parade ground, so no one can be an eminent Christian as soon as he is converted, and before he has been at his drilling. Self-improvement in knowledge by the student, and in business by the tradesman, are the result of great painstaking. No one can expect advancement without labor. It is astonishing and affecting to see how little anxiety there is among many to improve themselves in religion.

4. One great means of progress is *a constant, earnest, and spiritual attendance upon all the appointed means of growth.*

Private Prayer is essentially necessary. "And thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."—Matt. vi. 6. A spirit of prayer is so essential to personal religion, that it may as certainly be said that it is a dead soul in which there is not this spirit, as it may of the body that it is a corpse in which there is no breath. Prayer is the most secret intercourse of the soul with God—the converse of one heart with another.

Prayer requires retirement: a real Christian must be often alone with God. No one *can* make progress without much prayer. Religion is a plant that for growth must be often removed into the shade. It will be scorched and wither if it be always kept in the broad sunshine of publicity. It is the private intercourse of friends that increases their friendship. None can progress in love to God without this private communion. There must be time found and fixed for prayer, and the time fixed must be kept. That which is left to be done at any time, is likely to be done at no time. There is nothing about which a young Christian should be more anxious than maintaining the spirit, the love, the practice of private prayer; and nothing which should more seriously alarm him than any disposition to neglect this. He who makes any excuse for omitting the appointed hour of visiting a friend must be in a fair way to lose all regard for him.

But there are also public as well as private means to be observed. You must "*Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.*" How necessary a right, though not a gloomy or superstitious, observance of this day is to the preservation and strengthening of our piety is attested by the experience of others, and not less so by our own. It is true it is a feast, and not a fast, day, and should be kept in the spirit of the New and not of the Old covenant; that is, with joy and freedom, and not with gloom and bondage. Still it must be serious joy. He who passes his Sabbaths in frivolous conversation, and levity of spirit; who is not devout in his attendance upon the means of grace; who does not make the best of the precious opportunity to improve his religious condition; who conducts himself much as on other

days, except that he does not buy and sell, and goes once or twice to the house of God, cannot expect to get on in religion. Tell me how a professor spends his sabbaths, and I will tell you in what state his soul is—spiritually considered.

A Christian ought to be, and I am supposing he is, *a communicant at the table of the Lord.* If he is not, he ought to be. It is by way of eminence *the* ordinance. Apart from any superstitious notion of it, it is a solemn and impressive solemnity. As creatures formed to be moved, as well as instructed, through the medium of the senses, we are likely to be affected by those symbols of the body and blood of Christ, which, with such awful, though silent eloquence, speak to the ear of faith of him who is thus set forth crucified before us. Perhaps there is no ordinance of God, which when observed in a proper frame of mind speaks so forcibly to our hearts, and operates so powerfully upon our whole souls as this. There, believer, there, renew your faith in the crucified Saviour; there, increase your love as you see his love so strikingly exhibited; and, there, by the mercies of God, present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable, and well-pleasing to God. There, consecrate yourself afresh each time to his service as his faithful devoted servant. What progress can you expect to make if you neglect this institute so expressly set up, that through feeding by faith on the great sacrifice offered for you upon the cross, you might be "strengthened with all might by the Spirit in the inner man?"

Connected with this, is an attendance upon the solemnities of *public worship.* None who make any pretensions to religion can altogether neglect these. All such persons are there *some* part of the Sabbath.

But is it not too obvious to be denied, that modern habits of suburban residence in large towns are introducing a most injurious *partial* neglect of public worship. Once on the Sabbath-day, and never in the week, is all the attendance some give at the house of God. Can there be progress where this is the case? Can the soul be strong and healthy upon such scanty fare as one meal a week? They who would grow in grace, must love the habitation of God's house: must have the one desire of David to see God's power and glory in the sanctuary: must know something at least of what he felt when he said, "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?"—Psalm xlii. 1, 2. It is the man who loves the house of God; who will put himself to some little inconvenience, and will make some sacrifices of ease to be there; who is likely to profit by the appointed means. It is those that are *planted* in the courts of the Lord who shall flourish, and not those who are only *occasionally* there.

And then how much depends upon *the frame of mind* in which, and the purpose for which, this attendance is carried on. There is a manner of attending upon the means of grace, which instead of benefitting the soul does it great harm. Gospel sermons and the richest devotional services may harden the heart instead of sanctifying it, and be a savor of death unto death instead of life unto life. Let us never forget that to be *profited*, that is to be spiritually improved in knowledge, faith, holiness, joy, and love, is the end of hearing sermons, and not merely to have our taste gratified by genius,

eloquence, and oratory. I know scarcely any thing of more importance to put before a young Christian than the necessity, in order to a healthful state of religion, of a right end and object in hearing the Word of God. We live in an age when talent is idolized, and genius adored. This is, "the image of jealousy which maketh jealous" in the temple of the Lord. With too many it is not the truth of God that is thought of, valued, and delighted in but the talent of man with which it is set forth. Now we admit that it is almost impossible not to admire, and be affected by, genius. Mind must admire the nobler exhibitions of mind: and cultivated intellects cannot put up with the crude effusions of ignorance or dulness. To such persons, it is not only offensive to taste, but to piety, to hear such sublime and glorious themes as the gospel contains set forth in the mean and tattered habiliments of vulgar language and mean thought. Who would like to have the richest delicacies served-up on the meanest or broken earthenware? Even in regard to books, elegant typography and good paper add to the pleasure of reading, even where the matter is instructive, and the subject of perusal is interesting But it would argue an ill-regulated mind, in the one case, to be fonder of the elegance of the dish than of the good food which it contains; and in the other, of the type, paper, and binding of the book, than of the momentous subject on which it treats. It is scarcely possible to give a more important piece of advice to one setting out on the ways of God than our Lord's words, "TAKE HEED HOW you hear." We should hear sermons with something of the same state of mind, and for the same purpose, as we should directions from a physician

concerning our health—or from a lawyer how to avert an impending sentence of death.

Intimate converse with the Word of God is essential to progress. We must neither neglect nor idolize the preacher. The sermon in the house of God, must not displace the Bible from our hand. To be contented with the public ministry, without the private searching of the Bible, is virtually so far to turn Papists, or at any rate to act like them. It is painful to think how little use multitudes make of their Bibles. It is a question which might bring a blush, or ought to do, upon many a professor's cheek, "How many chapters of God's holy Word have you read the last week or month?" Not that the Scriptures should be merely read, for the sake of *being* read. Some no doubt prescribe to themselves the task of reading so many chapters every day: and perhaps with much the same motive as the Papist repeats his Ave Marias, or his Paternosters: as a kind of penance. This is not what we mean: and we would at once suggest, that as in eating it is not the quality of food taken into the stomach, but the quantity that can be digested, which keeps up our strength and promotes our health: so it is not the quantity of Scripture read, but the quantity studied, understood, and applied, that does us good. One verse pondered upon, felt, applied, is better than a whole chapter or book, read negligently, thoughtlessly, and without self-application. Not that a verse a day is enough spiritual food for any one. It may be feared that not a few have abused those little manuals of piety got up for the edification of persons who really cannot command time for much reading; I mean the "Text-a-day" books, which are now so common.

Surely they who *can* command time, should hardly be satisfied with such a crumb of the bread of life as this. A real, devout, and intelligent study of the Scriptures, then, is essential to great progress in the life of God. "Man liveth not by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." To every young convert, therefore, we say, "SEARCH *the Scriptures daily.* Meditate on the law of God day and night. Try how much of the Word of God you can understand, and what is more, try how much you can practise. Study the Word of God with prayer for divine teaching. Take up David's petition, 'Open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.' Remember this also—there is much corruption in your heart generating a false bias—and beclouding your judgment, and likely therefore to lead you to misconception and error. Beseech of God to send forth his Spirit into your heart to purify it from depravity, that your understanding may be better preserved from error. Enter deeply into the meaning and spirit of that remarkable saying of our Lord, "If any man will do his (God's) will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself."—John vii, 17. In this important passage we are taught that the disposition of the heart has much to do with the views and opinions of the intellect. In all moral questions it must be so. A sincere wish and purpose to *do* the will of God, will be our best way to *know* the mind of God. An honest heart is the most likely means to gain a correct judgment. True it is, that we must in some degree know the mind of God in order to do his will, but a desire to do his will, is also the way to know it more perfectly. We must have knowledge

to produce holiness, but holiness will prepare us for *more* knowledge. And the knowledge we acquire in this way will be of a spiritual and experimental kind. We must give up all pre-conceived ideas, all prejudices, all pride of intellect, and go in humility to the Scriptures as learners.

5. *A deep conviction and ever-present sense of the need of the Holy Spirit*, accompanied by a constant dependence upon him, is indispensable to progress in the divine life. Without this the soul can no more grow in grace, than the produce of the earth can be brought forth without the genial influences of the heavens. Whatever *means* are used, and all covenanted and appropriate ones *must* be used, still our dependance for their efficiency must be upon God's blessing. Hence says the apostle: "If we *live* in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit."—Gal. v. 25. First, as in the body, there must be the principle of life, then the activities of that principle. And in both natural and spiritual existence, it may be said, in God we live and move and have our being. Agreeably also to this, is the other exhortation of the same apostle, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."—Phil. ii. 13. This is one of the most instructive and important passages of the New Testament. Now, it must be observed that this was addressed to those who were supposed to be Christians, who were already saved, though not formally and finally possessed of salvation; and yet they are commanded to work out their salvation. Of course, therefore, it did not mean works for justification, for this was already completed. It means, "Go on working in your sanctification, with a view to the end of your

faith, the salvation of your souls. Go on earnestly in the way of holy walking, even to the close of life, for though you cannot be saved by and for your works, you cannot be saved without them: nor can you be saved unless you continue in them to the end." This is also to be done with "fear and trembling," that is with all that deep solicitude which he might be supposed to feel, who knows he has so important an interest at stake as an immortal soul. The most confident hope that we are in a state of salvation should not, in the smallest degree, abate our solicitude about our salvation. But now observe the motive: "*For it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do.*" God's working is not mentioned as a reason why we should *not* work ourselves, but as an inducement to engage us in an earnest and diligent co-operation with him. The meaning is, God exerts a certain influence upon our minds to produce a certain effect on us: that effect is, "to will," that is to "choose" to be holy; "to do," that is to perform holy actions. This effect *in* us is the end and purpose of his influence *upon* us. It is not God who wills and acts for us, but we who will and act ourselves under his influence. The *mode* of this divine influence we cannot explain. It is not a *physical* force, such as is exerted on passive unintelligent matter; nor is it the mere *moral* force of persuasion, such as one man exerts upon another by mere argument and entreaty; but it is an influence of a peculiar kind, and peculiar to this subject, the operation of the Divine Spirit upon the human mind, causing it to understand and yield to the power of truth as set forth in the Gospel, and addressed to man's intellect. We see in this passage, then, what every young convert should very distinctly notice and con-

stantly remember, the union of human activity and divine agency. We can do nothing good for ourselves without God's grace working in us, and God's grace never works in us but to lead us to do that which is good ourselves. We are not to sit down in indolent inactivity waiting for God's grace to set us upon working; but are without delay to begin working in a spirit of dependence upon God's grace. The husbandman sows his seed in expectation of the co-operation of the influences of the heavens; and so must the Christian go to his work. God's grace comes not upon the idle, but upon the diligent.

Christians in the early stage of their religious experience are but too apt to fall into one or other of the extremes of leaving God to do all, or attempting to do all themselves. The most common error is the latter. Full of the ardor of first love, they make resolutions, lay down plans, enter upon a course of action, too often in their own strength. They soon meet with checks and defeats. Their resolutions are broken, their plans frustrated, and their course impeded by unsuspected difficulties or successful temptations. Disheartened and discouraged, they are ready to give all up, and walk the ways of God no more. Let them rather learn the lesson of the great apostle who said, "When I am weak then am I strong;" or that other lesson, "Yet not I, but the grace of God in me." "Be strong *in the Lord* and in the power of *his might*." You cannot be too active as regards your own efforts; you cannot be too dependant as regards divine grace. Do everything as if God did nothing: depend upon God as if he did everything. Hence, do all in a spirit of prayer. Go to every sermon, every book, especially the Bible, every effort in a spirit of prayer. This is

to pervade everything. Prayer is the golden thread that is to run through all our actions, stringing them altogether, and suspending them all upon the hand of God.

6. The *company, conversation, and fellowship of established and earnest Christians*, will be of great service to the young disciple. "As iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend."—Prov. xxvii. 17. The allusion is familiar, but it is very illustrative. The knife whetted upon the steel acquires a sharper edge. By the intercourse of friends of congenial minds, knowledge is communicated from the more to the less intelligent: animation, encouragement, and courage from the lively and the sanguine to the dull, the timid, and the gloomy: caution, wisdom, and modesty, from the more to the less prudent and discreet: and exhilaration from the joyful to the sad. Thus the sympathies of friendship are made conducive to the advantage of those who enjoy them. Sharpening indeed must have been the intercourse with Christ on the way to Emmaus, when the hearts of the disciples burned within them, as he opened their understandings to know the Scriptures. Even the Apostle Paul himself, great and illustrious as he was, did not feel himself lifted above these sympathies of Christian friendship; even he was so cheered by the conference and countenance of friends, that he longed to be "somewhat filled with their company;" and when, in a moment of dejection, on his way to Rome, he saw the three brethren who had "come to meet him as far as Appii Forum and The Three Taverns," he recovered from his depression, "thanked God, and took courage." Hence, then, the necessity and advantage of Christian fellowship and religious friendship, and

I seriously and earnestly advise all young converts to cultivate it. They should not remain in solitude, having none with whom to exchange their thoughts, feelings, and solicitudes on those momentous topics which have lately possessed their minds. It is not good for them in *this* situation "to be alone." Solitary and secluded piety, like the fire of a single coal, burns feebly; but like that is more easily kept alive and kindled to a flame by contact with other coals. Great care, however, is necessary in the selection of companions. This is true in reference to all stages of our Christian history, but especially to the first. Those who are established in the divine life can bear with less injury the influence of persons whose taste, habits, and conversation are uncongenial with the spirit of true piety, than can the young convert. It is therefore important he should choose for his associates not only those who are *truly*, but those who are *eminently* pious. There is among those whom we may hope to be sincere in their profession a very great difference as regards the degree of their personal godliness. As there are those who are only *almost* Christians, there are others of whom it may be said, they are *only just* Christians. While the former seem only just *without* the line of demarcation between the converted and unconverted, the latter only just *within* it. Their attainments are so slender—their religion is so feeble—their conversation and spirit are so worldly and trifling—that it is difficult to determine their real spiritual character. *These* are not the associates which will help on the young believer. They will damp his zeal and cool his first love. It will be like plunging his knife into earth, which instead of sharpening it, will take off its edge; or like bearing his newly-lighted taper into foul air,

which will cause it to burn dimly, if it does not extinguish it. Instead of this, the inquirer after holiness and higher sanctification should associate with those who are as earnest as himself, or even more so, whose intelligence will instruct him; whose example will guide him; whose conversation will inspire him; whose cautions will warn him. Let him seek companions whose society will be as a prop round which his own young plant can entwine itself for support and growth, and by whose friendly aid his yet feeble tendrils shall be well sustained.

7. *Religious reading* is of great service to all, whether old or young in the Christian life. The Bible, I know, is the book of books, and should be supplanted by no other. But we would not imitate the conduct of the Caliph Omar, who committed the library of Alexandria to the flames, under the absurd idea that if the books contained only what was approved by the Koran, they were useless; if what was contrary to it, they were pernicious. Our religious literature is as valuable as it is extensive. If it contains no other religious truth than that which is in the Bible, which if it be orthodox, of course it cannot, it is still immensely valuable, as explaining and enforcing that which *is* in the Bible. It is one part of the creed of Popery that the Bible does not contain the whole Word of God, for tradition is a part of it; and we scruple not to aver that their oral law is in many things opposed to the written one. We reject all such unauthorized and wicked attempts to corrupt the Divine testimony, and abide close to the written law or holy Scripture. But though we deny *authority* to the works of men, we attach great importance to them as eminently useful in helping you to

undertsand the Word of God, and therefore earnestly recommend the perusal of them. To pretend to select from the flood of publications which is flowing in upon us in this extraordinary age any works that might be recommended, would be difficult and unnecessary, and had better be left to the counsel of those ministers with whom all young disciples are connected, and who, from a knowledge of their state of mind, or advance in religious subjects, might be supposed better to understand what is suitable for them. They who are really anxious for progress in the divine life, will not content themselves with the parlor reading of whatever religious books or periodicals may happen to be thrown in their way, but will have some biographical or devotional work, as a kind of closet companion, the pages of which will be prayerfully read in those seasons of retirement when the soul secludes herself from all human society to converse with God.

8. *Occasional seasons of extraordinary devotion, self-examination and humiliation* will be found eminently conducive to progress. I am of course supposing, for I have already prescribed it, that a regular course of private prayer is kept up. But we all know that regularity is apt to degenerate into formality; and what is customary, into mere routine. There may be the most exact order, and the most constant observance of religious exercises, and yet there may be nothing better than a dull round of observances. Hence it is indispensable that there should be occasional seasons of unusual devotion, when the soul shall take as exact account as it can of its state and condition. What has been already said on the subject of an excessive anxiety about our growth leading to almost a neglect of the *means* of progress, in an

inquiry into the *reality* of progress, should be borne in mind. But still occasional examination into the state of our profession cannot be wrong, but must be right. A tradesman who is *always* taking stock, under a fidgetty anxiety about his trade would only divert his attention from that industry and persevering effort which are essential to success. Still he ought occasionally to do this, or how else can he know how he is going on, or whether he is not going back. So also a nervous person always fearful about his health, and ever inquisitive into symptoms, and poring into books to see how ill he is, instead of using all the means of obtaining and preserving health, is not very likely ever to be well. Yet sometimes, provided it does not occur too often, or hinder him from present duties, he may inquire whether some chronic complaints are giving way, and whether his constitution is strengthening. We surely ought not to be less anxious about our soul's health than we are about that of our body; and though a religious nervousness about their soul, which really does distress some good people, should not be fostered, still an occasional examination into our spiritual condition ought to be instituted, and is really essential to progress. I don't see how we are to know what corruptions exist and are to be mortified, or what graces languish and need to be revived, without occasional more minute inspection than we give to the subject in our ordinary conduct. In this age when secular matters are so pressing, I may say, so engrossing and absorbing; when business so encroaches on devotion, and the time formerly given to the closet is taken away to be given to the shop; when all men are living in a hurry, and life itself is one constant bustle; surely, I say, at such

a time as this, it is necessary sometimes to step out of the circle, and to enter the closet for pressing home upon the conscience the momentous question, "How I am going on in my heavenly course?" Such seasons *may* be found, and if it can be at no other time, and in no other way, it is worth while to give up occasionally a sermon, and to spend the hour or two which would be otherwise devoted to that exercise in solitary communion with our own heart—with our Bible—and with our God.

9. This enumeration would be incomplete were I to leave out from it, as a means of progress, *those various afflictive events* with which it pleases God sometimes to try, to shake, and ultimately to settle and strengthen the faith of his people. Plants and trees not unfrequently, in very dry seasons, require watering at the time of, or soon after, their planting; and, indeed all vegetable life depends much on the rain and the dew for their growth. Hence God said to the Jews, "I will be as the dew unto Israel." Constant sunshine, especially for youthful vegetation, is unfriendly to prosperity. Hence God sometimes sees it necessary to darken the soul with cloud shadows, and cause the clouds themselves to pour down their contents on the young convert. Disappointed hopes of a worldly nature, frustrated schemes of happiness, and bodily sickness, even thus early, come on some persons, all the more painful and depressing because occurring at the outset of life. "What," says the early sufferer, "must I so soon prove how treacherous are the smiles of the world? So soon learn by experience that man is born to sorrow as the sparks fly upward? Must my very morning of life be overcast, and the first stage of my journey be amidst storms? Is my destiny so soon developed to be one

of grief and lamentation?" Hush those complaints—dry those tears—dismiss this foreboding, my young friend. It is wisdom, though you cannot understand it; and mercy, though you cannot at present see it. Have you never read what is said by the weeping prophet, "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth."—Lam. iii. 24. Observe, it is not said, it is "pleasant," but "good." At the very outset of life take up the conviction that everything is good for us that is good for our souls; and that God is the best judge of what is good for them. That very disappointment or other kind of affliction which cost you so many tears—such sleepless nights—such distress by days, was just the thing which your heavenly Father saw to be necessary at that time for your spiritual benefit. You were concerned about religion, and seemed in earnest; but you were in danger of being too much taken up with the world which had come out to meet you on your way with smiling face and open arms. The syren song had sent its music into your ears, and you were all but ravished and ruined by the strain. And then God, by the affliction he sent upon you, warned you of your danger, and plucked you from its jaws. Many in your situation have been treated in the same manner, and have at length been compelled to say—

"Foolish and vain I went astray,
Ere I had felt thy scourges, Lord;
I left my guide, and lost my way,
But now I love and keep thy word."

You recollect, perhaps, what God said to the Jews, "I spake unto thee in thy prosperity; but thou saidst, I will not hear: this hath been thy manner from thy youth, that thou obeyedst not my voice."—Jer. xxii. 21. It required a change of circum-

stances to bring them to a right mind: and that change came and effected its own gracious purpose. Perhaps this may have been the case with you. Full of the buoyancy and eager expectation of youth, it was not likely religion could flourish in such a state of mind as that, and as God had purposes of mercy towards you he sent trials, that he might effect his gracious designs. How strikingly is it said of Israel, "I will go and return to my place till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face; in their affliction they will seek me early."—Hos. v. 15. Yes, many, very many, will have cause through eternity to say—

> "Oh, hadst thou left me unchastised,
> Thy precepts I had still despised;
> And still the snare, in secret laid,
> Had my unwary feet betrayed."

I entreat you, therefore, to enter into God's gracious purpose, and thus gather grapes as it were from thorns, and figs from thistles, by rendering all your sorrows a means of progress in the divine life. Turn all these painful events to a good purpose to check your vanity, to curb your levity, and to establish you in the ways of the Lord. Let them show you the need of religion as a source of consolation amidst the vicissitudes of life, the power of religion to support you under them, and its ineffable sweetness to console as well as to support. I just now compared affliction to water, for so is it often represented in the Word of God; but not less frequently is it compared also to the action of fire. Perhaps you know that in enamel painting upon china this agent is employed. The colors are laid on, and then the article is put into a small furnace, and subjected to considerable heat, which at once brings out

some of the colors more vividly, and gives fixedness and perpetuity to them all in the painting. In delineating the divine image upon your soul, something like this method of painting may by the divine hand be adopted, and the spiritual coloring may be burnt in and perpetuated by the furnace of affliction. Consider it a mercy to have the work of grace carried on, though it be by a process so painful as this.

It will be very clearly and it may be hoped impressively seen by these particulars, that real religion is a very great thing—a matter of immense importance and requiring great exertion. No doubt many who have made a profession of it have formed very inadequate ideas of it, and are fearfully deceiving themselves, and it becomes all who shall read these pages, to inquire what they know of these things. Religion, as we have shown you, is a battle which requires complete armor, and the busy use of weapons, in order to secure a doubtful victory—a race in which many run, but in which few will gain the prize—a narrow path by which many shall seek to pass through the gate of life, and by which the few only who strive shall make good their entrance into the paradise of God. It is only by dint of painful and assiduous striving that salvation is at length secured, and just as the racer may be said scarcely to have won, who with the utmost power and fleetness makes good his distance by a hair's breadth of space, or within a moment of time, so is it said of the righteous by the apostle, that they are but "*scarcely saved*."—1 Pet. iv. 18. This is a tremendous passage, and is enough to awaken "fear and trembling" in us all. The righteous are *scarcely saved!* They escape from the fire into safety, but as by a hair's breadth. How great is the

difficulty of bringing them first to be in earnest about salvation. How great the difficulty of keeping them from turning back and away amidst the temptations to sin, and the allurements of the world, by which they are surrounded. How difficult to rescue them from the power of the great adversary of souls. Through the internal struggles of the mind, and outward conflicts of life, it often seems a matter of doubt whether, with all their efforts, they will be saved; and when they are saved they will appear to themselves as mariners who have been rescued from shipwreck, who are amazed to see how near they seemed to destruction, and how unlikely to all human appearance it seemed at one time they should be saved at all. Oh, is this true? then how comparatively few are in the way to be saved. Where, we ask, are those who are comporting themselves in a way answerable to such a representation? Eagerly, anxiously as for their lives, striving to flee from the wrath to come, and conscious that if they are saved, it will be so as by fire? Amidst the multitudes who in this day are making a profession of religion, how rarely are they to be seen who are diligently plying at the task-work of Christianity? Who are making a real business of their growing sanctification? Who are laboring for heaven as if pursued by a conviction that without effort they will never reach it, and that even after their utmost labors they will but save their distance, and scarcely reach the goal to which they are tending? Is it not time to sound the alarm, and especially in the cases of those who are just, according to their own declarations, setting out in the pursuit of eternal life?

If any on reading this should say, as did the apostles, "Who then can be saved?" I adopt our

Lord's reply, "With man it is impossible, but with God all things are possible." To every earnest soul Jesus says, "My grace is sufficient for thee."

ADDRESS TO THE READER.

Now turn back your attention upon the contents of this chapter, with even more solicitude, because of the greater importance of the subject, than you would in a time of bodily weakness upon some directions which had been given you concerning your health. First of all however, ask with serious and earnest concern the questions :—

Am I really so anxious to grow in grace as to be using all the necessary means for that purpose ? Am I serving my soul as I do my body, that is, by being careful about my spiritual health, and adopting all proper measures, and diligently employing them to promote it ? Have I solicitude enough about this matter to be active and earnest in the use of means ?

Do I really want to grow ?

Do I hunger and thirst after righteousness ?

Do I take pains for this self-cultivation ?

Do I most constantly and seriously attend all the means of grace, public as well as private, and week days as well as Sabbath days ?

Do I constantly, devoutly, read and study the Holy Scriptures, not allowing other books to supplant the Bible ? And do I search them to be made more holy ?

Do I feel my need of the Holy Spirit's influence, and am I constantly wrestling with God to bestow it upon me ?

Do I court the society of the more established and spiritual members of the family of God ?

Do I set apart special times for self-examination, humiliation, and prayer?

Am I improved and made more holy and spiritual by my afflictions, disappointments, and vexations?

Reader, I beseech you, bring yourself to this touchstone. You cannot progress unless you are anxious to do so, and use the means.

CHAPTER IV.

MISTAKES CONCERNING PROGRESS.

Suppose a man were on a journey which was of considerable importance to all his temporal interests, on which it was every way desirable he should be going forward with all convenient speed. Imagine also that through some ignorance of the country, or through his want of acquaintance with his rate of speed, he should conclude that he was advancing towards his destined point, while at the same time, though in constant activity, he was making no progress, but only wandering about in bye lanes and cross roads, and still remaining near the spot from whence he started. In such a case, he might lose the end and purpose of his journey. Now, there is something not unlike this in the course of some persons in regard to religion. They are in motion, but not in progress. The mistakes on this subject are very numerous, and require great pains in those who have to teach, to point them out; and also attention on the part of all who have any

solicitude about their spiritual welfare, in order to be acquainted with them. The temptations of the father of lies, aided by the deceitfulness of the human heart, originate many very injurious errors concerning our spiritual condition, and lull us into a state of complacency, where we ought to be deeply solicitous and somewhat alarmed.

1. It is not an unfrequent case *for persons to conclude they are advancing, because they are not, in their own view of their case, actually receding.* They do not see any outward and visible signs of backsliding. They have fallen into no grievous sin, and have brought no blot upon their character, nor discredit upon their profession. They are not conscious of any known departure from the way of rectitude, and have not fallen from their steadfastness. Their usual round of duties is performed, and they have not subjected themselves, by any part of their conduct to rebuke or censure. All this may be so, and yet there may be no progress. Is it enough to stand still on our path? Would it satisfy the man on the journey just alluded to, if he could merely say, "I am not going back?" Would this prove he was advancing? It may be said, and we have already said it, that in one sense not to advance is to recede. But were it not so, surely to stand still is not to go forward. Have you *more* knowledge, more holiness, more love, more spirituality, than you had? Is your growth *at all* perceptible, though it be in ever so small a degree? Do not compare yourselves with some who are rapidly going back, and imagine that in relation to them you are going forward, while you are standing still. Have you ever, when travelling in a steam carriage, while your own railway train was stopping at the station, and another was pass-

ing slowly in a contrary direction, imagined that it was you that were in progress? So is it in this case. You may be quite at rest, while, compared with others going back, you seem to be in motion forwards.

2. Some estimate progress *by the time they have been in motion.* Suppose a person unacquainted with the rate of speed of a ship at sea, and not understanding the influence of contrary winds, and the process of getting slowly on by tacking, were to calculate thus, "We have been so many hours or days at sea, and we must therefore be so far on our voyage." Suppose the man on the journey to have fallen asleep, or loitered away his time, and then, taking out his watch, were to calculate that because he has left home so many hours, he must be getting on very well. Is there nothing like this in some professing Christians? It is so many months or years since they took up their standing as religious persons. They have been all this while regular attendants at public worship, and communicants at the Lord's Supper. They have heard already innumerable sermons, and read many good books. They have outlived the novelties of a religious life, and the ways of God are now familiar to them. How can it be doubted, they say, that they who have been so long on the road are advancing? Ah! this is just calculating progress by time, rather than by distance. Be it known to you, that a professed Christian may be long, very long, in standing; yes, and after all, it is but *standing* without *going.* A dead stick, however long it may be in the ground, will not grow. Finger-posts stand for ages, and measure distances for travellers, but never advance an inch Do not conclude, then, that because your

conversion is supposed to have taken place long since, that, therefore, your sanctification must be far advanced. It is a pitiable sound, and argues an imbecile mind, as well as a diminutive body, to hear a poor dwarf cripple say, "I must be growing for I am ten years old." It may be, but everybody else sees that the poor child's stature never increases an inch. Let the Christian not think of the years he has lived, but the attainment he has made. The length of his profession ought to be attended by an advance in all that constitutes vital godliness, proportionate to the advantages he has enjoyed, and the time he has had them; but alas, alas, how rarely is this the case? In the orchard or vineyard, young trees may be growing when they bear no fruit, and a stranger may be ready to say they make no progress: but the skilled gardener says, "Give them time and they will exhibit produce." And when they *do* bear fruit, it is in proportion to their age. In the garden of the Lord young plants ought to fructify immediately, and the fruits of righteousness should be also in proportion to their age. But is it so? How many whose eye shall read these pages will blush, if they have any holy shame, to compare the date of their planting in the courts of the Lord, and the produce they yield.

3. There may be *an increase of theoretic knowledge*, and of ability to talk with fluency upon the subjects of religion, and to defend the truth against gainsayers, *without any corresponding advance in spiritual feeling and holy conduct.* There is a great deal of very interesting matter in the Bible, apart from its spiritual and vital power as God's instrument of sanctification. Its history, its poetry, its sublimity, its chronology, its eloquence, its prophecies, its

pathos, all may become subjects of study, and even of delightful study, without faith in its doctrines, or obedience to its precepts. Thousands and thousands of volumes have been written on religion by men whose hearts were never under its power. Some of the noblest productions of *sacred* science have issued from the pens of those to whom, it is to be feared, it was all mere theory. Like brilliant lamps, they lighted others on their way to heaven, but never moved themselves: or to raise still higher the metaphor, they were like light-houses, which directed ships on their course, but were stationary themselves. In more private life, and less important attainments, how many have made themselves acquainted with the theory of divine truth, as taught in books, sermons, articles, creeds and catechisms, so as to be able to explain the orthodox system of doctrine, and to argue for it, whose hearts have never been sanctified by the truth. And even where it may be hoped the great change has been wrought, and a start made for salvation and eternal life, there may be a growth in knowledge without a proportionate growth in grace. Many young persons are now happily engaged in Sunday-school teaching, the distribution of religious tracts, and various other operations of religious zeal, which give them of necessity a growing acquaintance with the system of religious truth. They can talk with more fluency and correctness on divine things. History, doctrine, and precept, are all more familiar to them, and at the same time their thoughts are more drawn to the subject of religion generally as the matter of their teaching. Hence, there may seem to be to themselves a perceptible progress. And so there is in theory. But if at the same time there is no advance in holiness,

Christian charity, conscientiousness, self-denial, and humility, these signs of advance may be, and are, all deceptive. Their knowledge has been collected, not as the materials of personal sanctity, but of activity. Such acquisitions may be only the "knowledge which puffeth up," but not "the love that edifieth."

There are persons whose acquaintance with Scripture is surprising, and yet who, though they could quote most aptly from nearly all parts of the Bible, give too convincing proof that their knowledge is of the letter only, and not of the spirit. I knew a person who was so intimately acquainted with the Scriptures, that if you gave him any chapter or verse in most of the books of either the Old Testament or New, he would immediately repeat the words; and yet he was altogether an unconverted man. And I was acquainted with another who was so fond of the study of prophecy that he became more conversant with the predictions of the books of Daniel and of the Apocalypse than any one I ever knew, who was at the same time entirely a man of the world. Yet there are many who regard this increasing acquaintance with the text of the Bible as an evidence of growth in grace. While, therefore, we would urge every young convert to make a longer and larger acquaintance with the Word of God, assuring them that there can be no growth in grace without some advance in knowledge, and that the more knowledge of it they have the more they are prepared to be useful, happy, and holy, provided they couple with it other things, yet that at the same time there may be large increase of knowledge, without any growth in grace. Ask yourselves then the solemn question, and ask it solemnly too,

whether in proportion as you store your minds with biblical texts and biblical ideas, you all the while are seeking to have your heart filled with biblical feelings, and your life with biblical actions? Is your advancing light attended with increasing warmth? As you grow in acquaintance with the character of God, do you reverence him more? As your ideas brighten on the person of Christ, do you love him more? As you become more acquainted with the perfection and spirituality of God's law, do you delight in it more and more after the inward man? As you see more clearly the evil of sin, do you hate it with a more intense hatred? As your horizon widens, do you become more profoundly humble, more tenderly conscientious, more gentle, more spiritual? Unless this be the case you are in a fatal mistake by supposing you are making progress in the divine life, merely because you are advancing in biblical science.

4. In some persons there is a *growing knowledge of their corruptions*, and perhaps, *an increase of lamentation over them*, unattended *by any disposition or effort to mortify them:* and yet this growing light into the depravity of their nature, and this real vexation, for so it may be called, rather than godly sorrow, leads to no proportionate mortification of sin. There can be little doubt that many *do* know more and more of the plague of their own hearts, and are made continually more sorrowful by it, who content themselves with venting their unavailing regrets, and make no progress in removing the evils they deplore, and yet conclude that this growing self-knowledge is an evidence of growing piety. So it would be if it were followed up by amendment. "Godly sorrow worketh repentance," that is *reforma-*

tion. And that sorrow is not godly, however pungent it may be, and however miserable it may make the man, which does *not* produce reformation. Many a holy Christian is made more and more holy with less of misery on account of sin, just because his grief, whether greater or less, leads to amendment, than he who, whatever may be his mortification of feeling, does not carry it on to a mortification of sin. What should we say of a housewife who made herself continually miserable about the disorder and uncleanliness of her house, but who took no pains to rectify the confusion and to expurgate the filth? It is to be greatly feared that very many professors of religion satisfy themself with being made unhappy by the knowledge and experience of their sins. They are loud in their lamentations, ample in their confessions, and seemingly profound in their humiliations. But there the matter ends. They who heard their self-abasing acknowledgments yesterday see them no better to-day. They are like some valetudinarians, whose diseases arise, in great measure, from their own indulgence, who are ever complaining of their ailments, and ever lamenting, as well as continuing, their imprudence, but who will never exercise that self-denial which is the only way to restoration, and who yet imagine it is a sign of growing attention to their health, because there is an increasing disposition to lament their sickness and to confess their imprudence.

5. A very common error is to mistake *a growth of sectarianism* for an increase of grace. Perhaps there is no delusion more common than this. Ecclesiastical polity and sacramental observances, as matters of divine revelation, are both of *some* importance; yet it is perfectly clear, from the testimony of Scrip-

ture, that they are of *less* consequence in the divine life, than faith, hope, and love. "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."—Rom. xiv. 17. "In Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but FAITH WHICH WORKETH BY LOVE."—Gal. v. 6. If these passages mean anything, they teach us the entire subordination of what is ceremonial to what is spiritual. To see a person more interested in, and more zealous for, some ritual observance, than the cultivation of charity—attaching more importance, both as matter of experience and controversy, to baptism and the external form of the church, than to the doctrines of justification, regeneration, and sanctification, marks a state of mind very different from that which is inculcated by the precepts, and manifested in the conduct, of the sacred writers. The great object of the apostles was to cherish in their converts the spirit of faith and the practice of holiness. Yet we very often see a different line of conduct, both in the teachers and professors of religion in the present day, by many of whom an extraordinary zeal is manifested for either established or unestablished churches, as the case might be; and for a more elaborate or a more simple ceremonial, while little concern is felt or expressed to inculcate "The fruits of the Spirit, which are love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance."—Gal. v. 22.

We not unfrequently see young professors, when their first concern about religion is over, taking up with the ardor of eager novices these secondary matters, and becoming zealots for supporting, defending and propagating them. This is sometimes

especially apparent in those who have lately transferred themselves from one section of the universal church to another. Proselytes, as if to prove the sincerity of their conviction, and reconcile themselves to their new party, usually, in supporting their novel opinions, excel in zeal those by whom these notions have been long held. A change of this kind has, in some cases, effected a complete transformation of character, and they who were before all torpor, are now all activity and energy; not, indeed, for the great fundamental truths on which all Christians agree, but for those minor matters on which they differ. Churchmen, that as such were dull and lethargic, have, on becoming dissenters, been all life and energy, not so much for faith, love, and holiness, but for nonconformity: while on the other hand dissenters, who, while such, were supine and inert, on entering the establishment, have become the zealous advocates and propagators of perhaps even high-church principles. Let not persons of this description mistake such sectarianism for advancement in the divine life. This holy vitality has reference rather to the principles on which all are agreed, than to those minor matters on which they differ. A mighty furor about nonconformity, or a most impassioned zeal for religious establishments, may comport with very little vital godliness; yea, the former may go far to enfeeble the latter. Instead therefore of such a state of mind indicating progress, it manifests a retrogression. The man has become more of a dissenter or churchman, but perhaps less of a spiritual, humble, and simple-minded Christian. It is the human element in their religion, not the divine, that has strengthened; the shell that has thickened, not the kernel that has enlarged. There has been

motion, but it is a lateral one from the straight line, not a progress in the right direction. It is a going down and going back from primary to secondary matters. An excrescence has grown upon the tree, but the tree itself has been hindered and not helped in its advance.

6. Much the same remark will apply to *a growing attachment to some particular preacher*, which is not always of itself a proof of progress in religion. We are allowed our preference even in this matter: for though it is the message rather than the messenger —the truth rather than the preacher—that is to be the ground of our attachment, yet it cannot in the nature of things be otherwise than that we should prefer one minister to another. He may have been the instrument of our conversion, or the means of our establishment; or, independently of these matters, he may more clearly explain, and more powerfully enforce God's truth: or even without this, his natural abilities with equal orthodoxy and piety may be more to our taste; and on all these grounds preference, within certain limits, is allowed. But nothing in a young convert requires greater care and effort to keep down excess, than ministerial attachment, lest it should degenerate into exclusiveness and spiritual idolatry. This is a danger into which multitudes run. They make this pulpit favorite not only the standard of all excellence but its monopolist. They think meanly of every one else. They can hear, at or any rate relish, no other. When he preaches elsewhere they follow him: or if they cannot do this, they make up their mind not to profit by his substitute. This actually grows upon them till *he* is everything, and all other ministers nothing. Now this very attachment is

by some supposed to be a proof of progress; especially in the case of those who formerly cared nothing about this minister, or any other. They now feel pleasure in hearing him, but then it is confined to him, and this preference, instead of leading them to love him for the sake of the truth he preaches leads them rather to love the truth for the sake of the preacher. If with their preference for him, they united a delight in hearing all who preach the same truths; and his preaching had formed in them a taste for evangelical doctrines, instead of for one man who preached them, this would be a blessed result, and one that would prove advance in religion. Perhaps there are few evidences more conclusive of progress than such a state of mind as is described in the following reflections, "At my first setting out in the ways of religion, I felt a preference for my minister so strong, that I could hear with pleasure no other. I was disappointed and discontented if I saw any one else in the pulpit, and thought the sermon scarcely worth listening to. I now see it was more an attachment to the preacher himself than to his message. True, I was pleased with his doctrine, but still more with his manner of setting it forth. As my knowledge of divine truth increased, and I became more and more in love with this, I found my delight more and more drawn off from the preacher to his doctrine. Till now, with my preference for him above all others still remaining, I am so much taken up with the truth as it is in Jesus, and feel so much more the importance of the matter than the manner, that I can hear any one with pleasure who, with tolerable ability, explains and enforces the glorious gospel of the blessed God. It is the man who opens most clearly to my judg-

ment the truth of God's word, and enforces it most powerfully upon my heart and conscience, and carries on my growth in knowledge, peace, and holiness—that is the preacher I love most." There is no mistake here.

7. Somewhat analogous to this, some mistake *a growing delight in some particular theory*, or some particular parts, aspects, and subjects of the Bible, for progress in the divine life. "All Scripture," to quote this passage again, "is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." But all Scripture is not *equally* adapted to foster the strength and promote the health of the soul. Now it is clear to any one who will attentively study the New Testament, that *the* truth by which we are to be sanctified—*the* doctrine which is according to godliness—*the* "perfection," which is distinguished from first principles—is the mediatorial character and work of Christ. This seems to be plain from our Lord's words, "Verily, verily, I say unto you except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed."—John vi. 53–55. This is a most momentous passage, and deserves the very serious attention of all, and especially of young converts. It is of vast consequence, in corporeal dietetics, to know what is the most nourishing food, and what will sustain the strength and increase the stature of the body. Can it be less so in the dietetics of the *soul?* Here then, by

Him who came to give life—by the Physician of the soul—we are told upon what food the growing Christian must live. In these words our Lord did not, could not, mean to be understood literally. By his flesh and blood, he meant his body offered up in sacrifice, and his blood shed as an atonement for sin; and by eating his flesh and drinking his blood, he intended nourishing the divine life by the knowledge, the faith, the contemplation, of his death as it is set forth in the Scriptures. The study of everything that stands connected with the death of Christ, whether it be in the types of the ceremonial law, the predictions of the prophets, the narratives of the Gospels, the doctrines of the epistles, or the sublime visions of the Apocalypse—this is the food of the soul—the manna from heaven—the bread of life. This is "*meat indeed*," and "*drink indeed*." Whosoever with hungry appetite feeds upon this will grow: and whosoever neglects this will become lean and weak. Now there is a proneness in some to neglect this, and endeavor to support their spiritual strength by something else. It is not the study of the natural history, or chronology, or historical facts, or beautiful poetry, or pathetic narratives, or sublime compositions of the Bible, that will best sustain our strength, and yet some are thus attempting it. They see many beauties in the Bible to which they were formerly blind. They are enamored with the sublimities, for instance, of the book of Job or Isaiah. They admire the wondrous wisdom of the book of Proverbs. They luxuriate amidst the pathos of the history of Joseph, or the morality of the Sermon upon the Mount. Their attachment to those parts of revelation is rather growing than declining, and in proper measure all this is highly commendable.

Such books as Gilfillan's "Bards of the Bible," and Kitto's "Daily Readings," should be read, and cannot be read without admiration, and exquisite delight, and valuable information. And many do read them with these feelings, and hence they imagine they are progressing in religion, although they have little relish, perhaps, for the doctrines of the Gospel —the mediation of Christ—the salvation into which the prophets inquired diligently, and the angels desired to look. They do not feed on the flesh and blood of the great Sacrifice.

8. There may be a mistake made, by *the mortification of some* ONE *sin while others are left unsubdued.* It is so far an advance if one enemy of our soul, from right motives and by right means, be destroyed. And in the work of spiritual improvement it is wise and well, instead of losing our time and wasting our energies in mere general and unsystematic mortification, to select occasionally some *one* sin to begin with in the way of more direct and concentrated attack: and no doubt the crucifixion of that corruption—the cutting off of that right hand, or the plucking out of that right eye, is a gain in sanctification—a step in advance—and a means of gaining other victories. But what I am anxious to guard you against is, the supposition that because some one evil to which you may be more strongly tempted is abandoned; or some practice which may militate against your health, or interest, or comfort, is given up, you are going on. Sin may be discontinued for various reasons. A drunkard may give up his inebriety, not because it is sinful, but hurtful. Another may discontinue some fraudulent practice, not because it is forbidden by God, but is disgraceful in the estimation of man.

A young professor may give up some ensnaring worldly amusements, not because he is afraid of their influence upon his spiritual welfare, but because they make too great inroads upon his purse. It is not therefore the abstract abandonment of a sin, but the motive which leads to it, which is a proof of the work of grace. "How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" This must lie as the motive at the base of all mortification of sin. And then moreover the destruction of any *one* sin must be viewed and carried on as a part of the purpose and the act for the destruction of *all* sin.

I now proceed to enumerate and to correct some mistakes of a contrary nature to those just considered. I mean such as are committed by those who *are* making progress, and yet are somewhat anxious and distressed under supposition that they are *not;* and even fearing that they are declining.

The cases are perhaps not numerous of persons deeply concerned about salvation, really earnest in religion, and yet harassed with the apprehension that they are at a stand still, or even going back. There is a sincere desire to advance in holiness, and to increase in spirituality; and they are even diligent in the use of means to accomplish that end. In reference to them, I do not hesitate to say that their very state of mind is itself an evidence of progression. This solicitude is itself advancement. The very desire of improvement, the will to go on, the longing after greater attainment, *is* improvement. It is itself an impulse—a forgetting the things that are behind, and a reaching forward unto those things that are before. There cannot be a more convincing proof of halting or retrogading than complacency in ourselves. While on the other

hand, a growing disposition to find fault with ourselves, and humble ourselves, and really improve ourselves, is one of the brightest indications of our going forward, provided there is all diligence in the use of the means of self-improvement.

Some are fearful that they are not making progress because *their feelings are not so vividly excited in religious matters as they formerly were.* They are not easily and powerfully wrought upon either in the way of joy and sorrow, hope and fear, as they once were. They have not those lively and ecstatic states of mind which they formerly experienced when they began the divine life.

Here we must just glance at the constitution of our nature. Religion exerts its influence over *all* the faculties of the soul: it calls into exercise the understanding, engages the determination of the will, moves the affections, and quickens the conscience. The same differences of natural constitution will be observable in some degree in the new or spiritual nature as existed in the old or physical one. A person of great sensibility in ordinary things, will, after conversion, be so in spiritual ones; while they of little emotion in the former will exhibit the same phase of mind in the latter. The sensibility or emotional state of the mind depends very much therefore on our physical organization. Now it is a very wrong criterion of the reality and degree of our religion to judge of it only by the exercise of the affections. Some persons of excitable natures are easily moved to joy and sorrow, hope and fear. The power of poetry or eloquence, of sights of distress or raptures, over their feelings is irresistible, while at the same time their judgments are not proportionately employed, their wills not in the same measure en-

gaged, and their conscience but little moved. Take, for instance, the sentimental readers of novels, how by fits they are melted to tears, or excited to ecstasies. Yet how idle and unemployed are all the other faculties of the soul. There is no virtue in all this. It is mere sympathetic emotion. Now look at the philanthropist. He may not be a man of tears, or of *strong* and vivid emotions of any kind, but he is a man of principle. His understanding comprehends the circumstances of some case of deep distress, and he judges it is right to pity and relieve it. His heart, though not wrought up to extreme anguish, so as to fill his eyes with tears, and his mouth with loud lamentations, feels for the miserable object; his will resolutely determines at once to help the sufferer; and his conscience, which would condemn him if he did not, approves the determination. You will particularly notice what constituted the virtue of the good man; not wholly the emotional excitement, for there was very little, but the dictates of the judgment, the determination of the will, and the action which was performed under these conjoint powers. So it is in religion, which consists partly of the exercise of *all* the faculties, but chiefly of the judgment, will, and conscience. The *heart* is of course, engaged, for we must love God and hate sin: we must delight in Christ and fear the wrath to come; but the amount of vivid emotion is of little consequence, compared with an enlightened judgment, showing us clearly what is right and wrong; a determined will to avoid the evil and perform the good; and a tender conscience shrinking from the least sin. Emotion is, to a certain extent, instinctive, involuntary, and irrepressible. Not so with judgment, will, and conscience. It is not, therefore, the amount of

feeling, but of willing and doing, and approving or condemning, that determines the state of religion. There is such a thing I know—and, alas, it is a very common one—as losing "first love," and it is marked by our Lord with his disapprobation in his address to the church at Ephesus; but many distress themselves on this account who have no need to do so. Their ardour perhaps, at first was in some measure the excitement of animal feeling, which will soon die away of course, though their *real practical* love may not be diminished, but may be growing stronger. When a son returns home after a long absence, especially if he be a reclaimed prodigal, and meets his parents, brothers, and sisters, there is a glow of feeling, a joyousness of emotion, which cannot be expected to continue always, and which he may never be able to recall again, though he may be ever growing in *real* attachment to his friends and his home.

From all this it will be seen that the emotional part of religion may be, and is by many, over-estimated. The question is not merely what we can *feel*, but what we can *do*, for Christ; not how many tears we can shed, but how many sins we can mortify; not what raptures we can experience, but what self-denial we can practise; not what happy frames we can enjoy, but what holy duties we can perform; not simply how much we can luxuriate at sermon or at sacrament, but how much we can exhibit of the mind of Jesus in our intercourse with our fellow-men; not only how far above earth we can rise to the bliss of heaven, but how much of the love and purity of heaven we can bring down to earth—in short, not how much of rapt feeling we can indulge, but how much of religious principle we can bring to bear on our whole conduct.

It is evident, therefore, there may be progress where there is a fear that there has been declension. The vividness of feeling may have subsided, but if the firmness of principle has been strengthened, it is only like the decadence of the blossom when the fruit has set. The joy might not be so great, but it may be more intelligent, more solid, and more sober. Just as the exuberant delight of the child, when it passes off, leaves the pleasure of the youth less noisy, but more rational. The frames and feelings may be less rapturous, but they may at the same time be less idolised, less depended upon, less put in the place of Christ. The young Christian is less pleased with self, but sees more of the glory of the Saviour: his own righteousness appears more imperfect and defiled, and is therefore less loved, but the righteousness of the Saviour comes out before him more beautiful, glorious, and necessary.

Distress is sometimes felt in consequence of mistaking *a clearer view and deeper sense of depravity for an actual increase of it.* This is by no means an uncommon case. The young Christian seems sometimes to himself to be growing worse, when in fact it is only that he sees more clearly what in fact he really is. In the early stages of religion we have usually but a slender acquaintance with the evil of sin or the depravity of the heart. The mind is so much taken up with pardon and eternal life, and even, indeed, with the transition from death to life, that it is but imperfectly acquainted with those depths of deceit and wickedness which lie hid in itself. And the young convert is almost surprised to hear older and more experienced Christians talk of the corruptions of their nature. It is almost one of the first things one should suppose they would feel,

yet it is one of the last they effectually learn, that religion is a constant conflict in man's heart upon earth, between sin and holiness. At first they seem to feel as if the serpent were killed, but they soon find that he was only scotched, for by the warmth of some fiery temptation, he is revived and hisses at them again, so as to require renewed blows for his destruction. Nothing astonishes an inexperienced believer more than the discoveries he is continually making of the evils of his heart. Corruptions which he never dreamt to be in him, are brought out by some new circumstances into which he is brought. It is like turning up the soil, which brings out worms and insects that did not appear upon the surface. Or to vary the illustration, his increasing knowledge of God's holy nature, of the perfect law, and the example of Christ, is like opening the shutters, and letting light into a dark room, the filth of which the inhabitant did not see till the sunbeams disclosed it to him.

Sometimes the young convert is discouraged, because *he does not increase as fast as he expected;* and supposes because he does not accomplish all, and as speedily as he looked for, that he does not advance at all. The expectations of young Christians are sometimes as irrational as the child's who sowed his seed in the morning, and went out in the evening to see if it was above ground. The recent convert sometimes imagines that sanctification is easy to work, and advance, for a regenerated soul, a thing to be accomplished by a succession of strides, if not, indeed, by one bound after another. But the, remains of old Adam within him soon prove too strong to allow this unimpeded course of Christian progression. He knew he had difficulties to sur-

mount, but he calculated on getting over them with ease: that he had enemies to conflict with, but then he hoped to go on by rapid victories from conquering to conquer. He is disappointed: and now imagines he makes no way at all. But why should he so hastily decide against himself? All growth is slow, and that is slowest of all which is to last the longest. The mushroom springs up in a night: so did Jonah's gourd; and in a night it perished. The oak requires centuries for its coming to perfection.

Some mistake by supposing they do not advance at all because *they do not get on so fast as some others.* We would by no means encourage neglect, indifference, or contentment with small measures of grace. On the contrary, we urge the greatest diligence. We say go on unto perfection. They who are contented with what grace they suppose they have, give fearful evidence that they have none at all. To be self-satisfied is to be self-deceived. Still, as in nature so in grace, all do not grow with equal rapidity, or advance to equal strength and stature. It is so with flowers in a garden; trees in a plantation; children in a family; boys at school; ships at sea; or travellers upon the land. There is progress in all, but in different degrees. Yet of which of all these can it be said, they make no advance because they do not advance as fast as the foremost. The use we should make of the superior attainments of the more eminent of God's servants is neither to envy *them*, nor to discourage our hearts, but to find in them a stimulus and an encouragement to seek larger measures of faith and holiness for ourselves.

ADDRESS TO THE READER.

Reader, this is an unspeakably important chapter for you to ponder. You must not pass from it in haste, but linger, and muse longer and deeper. You must now take up the candle of the Lord, as I have said, and go down into the very depths of the soul, to search its hidden recesses. Nor should you trust to your own inspection and scrutiny. Like David, you should earnestly pray to God to search you, and reveal your real state to you.—Psalm cxxxix. 23, 24. He knew how prone we are to self-love and self-deception; how sin lies hidden in the folds of the heart's deceit, and therefore he begged the trial and scrutiny of eyes more piercing and less partial than his own. So must you. We are all liable to judge too favorably of our own case. Do, do, consider the fatal, the dreadful, the eternal consequences of a mistake on this subject. Oh, the idea of imagining we are going on to heaven, when step by step we are advancing to hell. Is this *possible?* It is; and the very possibility should awaken our alarm. Is it *probable?* It is; and this should increase our alarm. Is it *certain?* It is; and this should raise still higher our anxiety. Is it *common?* It is; and this should carry our solicitude to the highest pitch. What said Christ? Read with awe and trembling.—Matt. vii. 21–23. Read, I say, this passage in which our Lord with his own hand rings the toscin and sounds alarm through the whole church. Ought you not to examine? Is not there need of it? Is it not all but madness to go on without it? Mistake! What in such a matter as salvation? Mistake! What in a matter in which

an error will require, as I have often said, an eternity to understand, and an eternity to deplore it!

Are you quite sure this is not your case? Take up the subject, then, and put the following questions to your soul.

Am I right, and tolerably *sure* that I am?—Truly converted to God?—A real Christian?

If I *am* a *true* Christian, am I *really* an advancing one, or am I mistaking a declining state for an advancing one?

Am I mistaking a lengthened *term* of profession for a genuine improvement?

Am I putting an increase of knowledge, and of ability to *talk* about religion, in place of an increase of holiness?

Does it satisfy me to grow in knowledge and lamentation of my corruptions without mortifying them?

Am I confounding sectarianism with true piety? Attachment to some preacher with love to the truth? and zeal for some favorite theory with real regard for the gospel?

Is my mortification of sin confined to some one corruption, which interest, ease, or reputation may require me to surrender; or is it directed against *all* sin.

Is my religion a mere excitement of the emotions, and my growth only a greater excitability; or is my will more and more determined for God, my conscience more tender, and my life more holy?

Inquire, I beseech you, into these things. Be determined, by God's grace, to know the real state of the case, and to be under no mistake. Be this your prayer, "O God of truth, thou that searchest the hearts and triest the reins of the children of

men, thou knowest I would not for ten thousand worlds be deceived about my spiritual state. Do thou who knowest me altogether make known to me what I really am in thy sight. Painful as it would be to find out that I have been deceiving myself, this were infinitely better than for me to go on in error till the mistake is past being rectified. I want to know my real state. Even if I *am* a Christian, and yet mistaking declension for progress, I wish to know *this* also. Let my spiritual insight be clear, my self-acquaintance be accurate. Suffer me on no account to deceive myself, even as regards my progress or decline."

CHAPTER V.

HINDERANCES TO PROGRESS.

It is indeed a melancholy thing for the growth of grace to be stopped; and to see the spiritual child remaining a dwarf. But it need not be so, unless the child chooses it.

I. There is *indifference* to growth. This has been in some measure anticipated where we have said that earnest concern and desire are among the means of progress. If so, then indifference must be an impediment to growth. It is not so in nature. A child in health will grow, and does grow, without a thought or a care about the matter. He may never have one idea about it; may be as indifferent as a lamb, or a young dove, a tree, or a flower; yet his

indifference will not affect his growth. But it is not so with a young Christian. Indifference here is fatal to all progress. Look at this. Indifferent! What, about progress to heaven, and a fitness for it? Indifferent! What, about increasing knowledge of eternal truth? Indifferent! What, to increase in holiness, which is the image of God in the soul of man? Indifferent! What, about the development of that character which is formed by a divine hand, of heavenly materials, and for eternal ages? Young professor, can you endure the thought, does it not astound you, alarm you, distress you, to think of being hindered by indifference? Oh, cast it away at once, and kindle into solicitude and concern. Be indifferent to anything, or everything else, rather than to this.

II. Of course we must not leave out of consideration, but place distinctly before you, *the remaining corruption of human nature*, and its imperfect sanctification: and this must be viewed in connection with *the temptations of Satan*. This view of the case has come out incidentally, and may yet come out in other parts of the volume; but, on account of its importance, it must have a separate place assigned to it here. It is well for the young convert to have a very clear and vivid perception of his condition—of what he really is, what he has to contend with, and what exertion therefore is necessary to overcome the resistance he meets with in his course. What then is the real condition, and what are the true circumstances, of the person whose case I am now meeting? He is supposed to be truly regenerated, but at the same time only partially sanctified. Sin is dethroned, but not destroyed. His predominant taste and disposition are holy, but his principles have not

yet struck their roots very deep into his soul. His purposes are somewhat irresolute, and his inclinations to evil sometimes strong, just because, to use a Scripture expression, "the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and these are contrary the one to the other." Satan knows all this, and by methods which we cannot understand plies the soul with his various machinations and subtle temptations. We need not, for it is useless, attempt to explain the mystery of Satanic influence. It is nowhere laid open to us. One thing, however, beyond the fact that he does so tempt us, is certain, that he always assails us through the medium of our own thoughts, imaginations, and feelings. Somehow or other he has the power of exciting these. So that our resistance of evil *in* ourselves is properly the resistance of the devil *without* us. No perplexity, therefore, need trouble us about meeting the temptations of Satan, for to vanquish our own evil hearts is to vanquish *him*. It is well to know, to consider, to ponder, the fact that there is still the danger of an evil heart of unbelief, aided by the power of Satan, hindering us on our way, and attempting to turn us out of it. We are not only like Bunyan's pilgrim, when we first become anxious, setting out with a burden of guilt upon our back; but when, like him, we have lost that at the cross, we have still another burden of imperfections and corruptions to carry, which without great labor and effort will sadly retard us. It must be understood well: that though all external circumstances of situation, and helps, and advantages, were as favorable as they could be, we still have a sad drawback within. We are like a traveller who is on a smooth road, has fine weather, is intimately acquainted with the way, has agreeable and helpful

companions, but who at the same time is very lame, or has a load to carry. His lameness or his load will be a great delay to him. His attention must be directed to these things. He must cure the one or lighten the other, or he will make slow progress.

III. *Besetting sins* are powerful hinderances. "Lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth easily beset you," said the apostle. In the case of most persons, there is some one sin to which, either from their situation, constitution, taste, or other circumstances, they are more powerfully tempted than to others. Satan knows very well what in every case this is, and skilfully adapts his temptations to it. He is an expert angler, and never takes his bait, or throws his line, at random. Independently, however, of him, the very tendency of the heart is in that direction. That one sin, whatever it be, while indulged, will hold you back: you cannot get on till it is mortified. Even its partial indulgence, though it may be considerably weakened, will hinder you. Study then your situation, circumstances, and constitution. You cannot be so ignorant of your past history, your present situation, your constitutional tendencies, your experience, your failures, your resolutions, as not to know what it is which, in the way of temptation and sin, you are most exposed to. You must, you do know, in what you have most frequently wounded your conscience, and occasioned to yourself shame and sorrow. Is it an unsanctified temper? An impure imagination? A proud heart? A vain mind? A taste for worldly company? A proneness to envy and jealousy? A love of money? A tendency to exaggeration in speech? A fondness for pleasure? A disposition to censoriousness, detraction, and

backbiting? Study yourselves. Examine your own heart. You must find out this matter, and it requires no great pains in order to know it. It floats upon the surface of the heart, and does not lie hidden in its depths. There, there, is your danger. As long as that sin, be it what it may, is indulged, you cannot advance. Other sins are as unnecessary garments to the ancient racer: this, like a chain round his ankle, or a clog to his feet.

IV. The *mistakes* mentioned in the last chapter are a very considerable hinderance to progress. These should be well studied and minutely examined. On an ordinary journey errors of this kind will have great influence in keeping back the traveller. He who supposes he is advancing when the contrary is the case, cannot of course get on. We therefore recommend a very close study of that chapter with especial reference to the subject of this.

V. There are *some situations* in life very unfriendly to growth in grace. Plants, if they flourish, require adaptation of soil, atmosphere, and treatment. So do animals. So do young children. So do young Christians. In all these cases, however, except where the situation is so uncongenial as to be certain death, and certain destruction to the subject of care, much may be accomplished by extraordinary attention and culture. Corn, by great skill, labor, and expense, may be made to grow in unfavorable soils. Animals accustomed to a warm climate may by very great care be kept alive, and even in tolerable health, in colder regions. Children *do* grow in the absence of many things conducive to health. So it is with the plants of grace, the lambs of Christ's flock, the children of God. Religion has to exist sometimes in situations

most inauspicious to its growth, yea to its very existence. A servant girl, for instance, may be awakened to a serious concern about the salvation of her soul, while engaged in a large family, incessantly occupied, and associated with other servants, who are not only destitute of all religion themselves but who ridicule and oppose hers; while the heads of the family are also utterly irreligious, so that in all that house there is nothing to cherish but every thing to wither the blossom of piety in this poor girl's soul. Or a young man may be led in earnest to "Remember his Creator in the days of his youth," and at the time when this new solicitude is awakened in his soul, he is engaged as shopman in some large establishment, where he is surrounded by a number of scoffing, dissolute, and infidel associates, and the master is as ungodly as his servants. Or, a young lady may start in the divine life, in the midst of a gay, wordly, fashionable family. Or a wife may become seriously concerned about divine and eternal realities, whose husband is entirely a man of the world, and requires her to be of one taste with him, in all his amusements and pursuits. Now can we conceive of anything more unfriendly to earnest, consistent, advancing religion, than these and many other situations which may be easily imagined, and yet growth is required even here. "Growth!" exclaim some, "why *life* is scarcely possible here. You may as soon expect pine apples to grow on the summit of Mont Blanc, or roses and myrtles to flourish amidst the Polar ices, as think of religion thriving in such situations as these." This is to miscalculate its own vital strength, and also the mighty power of God. I have known, and many more have known it to flourish in all these

circumstances. I remember the case of a lady, who within the first month of her marriage with an ungodly husband, was brought under concern about religion, to which, all that time, she had been a total stranger. And while engaged in all the round of those festive parties and amusements which are customary in fashionable circles on such occasions, had to struggle with this new anxiety recently awakened in her heart, and subsequently with the opposition of her husband, and of her nearest relatives. Yet, by the grace of God, her piety not only lived but flourished.

Still it shall be conceded that the situations supposed are, for experience and observation prove it, uncongenial with the growth of grace. It *is* difficult to keep a *standing* there, much more to advance. But it is possible; and the very possibility is encouraging. Consider how much is at stake—the soul—salvation—heaven—eternity. Consider how much greater your condemnation will be, if having once been awakened, you relapse again into a deadly slumber. Be duly aware, then, of the difficulty of your situation, and even alarmed at it. Say to yourselves, "How can I stand firm?" If you can alter your situation, it may be well to do so: I advise it. You should not be self-confident, and say, "I can trust myself. My mountain stands strong, I shall never be moved. I fear nothing." Then *I* fear for you. Such a spirit is the precursor of a fall. "Be not high-minded, but fear:" "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Flee, I say, flee if you can; that is, if your present situation be not one of obvious duty, which leaves you no choice. Some of the cases I have mentioned answer to this description, and do leave you no option.

The daughter cannot in many instances quit her father's house; nor can the wife, the home of her husband. Where this occurs, let there be the most earnest prayer to God for divine grace, and full unwavering faith in the Divine promise. Let such persons lay their case before the Lord, and remind him of their peculiar need of his most gracious assistance. Let them open the ear of faith, and hearken to his voice. "Fear thou not; for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness."—Isaiah xli. 10.

VI. Among the hinderances to progress in religion must be mentioned *companionship*. "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise," says Solomon, "but a companion of fools shall be destroyed."—Pro. xiii. 20. We take the tinge of our character from those, and in return give back in brighter hue the color of our own to them, with whom we associate. We are all the communicants and recipients of unconscious influence; just as healthy or diseased subjects are supposed to keep the atmosphere around them salubrious or infectious. As, therefore, we would preserve our spiritual health and promote our increase of strength, let us avoid the society of those whose company and conversation are unfriendly to piety. The strength of our convictions, the fixedness of our habits, the clearness and settledness of our principles, and the firmness of our resolutions, must in a great measure depend upon our associates. David said, "I am a companion of all those that fear God and keep his statutes." As to the choice of good and suitable companions as a means of progress, I have already written in a former

chapter: but now I speak of the avoidance of unsuitable ones, of such as would be a hinderance to it. And I would, with all the emphasis it is possible to give to written language, conjure the young professor to be most anxiously and tremblingly concerned about this matter. It may happen that now when first brought under concern about salvation, you may have companions congenial with your former tastes; and some to whom you were much attached, but who are still as regardless of religion as you once were. This is indeed a painful and perplexing situation, and will expose you to considerable danger. You will find it difficult either to dissolve the ties of friendship, or to maintain them without peril to your infantine religion. To withdraw from those in whose society you have spent so many cheerful hours, will be like cutting off a right hand, or plucking out a right eye. Well, and are not these the terms of Christian discipleship? Why, in the times of persecution, the saints were often called to surrender husbands or wives, parents or children, for Christ's sake; and can you not give up a friend? Will you risk your religion, and jeopardise your soul, at the shrine of friendship? Do you not know that your religious character must be distasteful to your former friends, and that their pursuits and conversation are now distasteful, and actually injurious to you? Do you not come from their society with religious ardor damped, the spiritual taste lowered, the devotional spirit impaired, and the conscience offended and wounded by your sinking too deeply into the current of their conversation? Is it not felt by you that there is one subject, and that the most momentous of all, in reference to which you can have no sympathies and

no conversation in common? You *must* withdraw. It is come to this, that you must sacrifice your friends or your souls; which shall it be?

We do not say that this should be abruptly, much less rudely or sanctimoniously done. There must be nothing at all approaching to the "Stand by, I am holier than thou." It might be well, first of all, by letter or personal intercourse, to endeavor to influence your friends to adopt similar views to your own; to use all the gentle and unassuming arts of affectionate persuasion, to induce them to go with you in the ways of wisdom and the paths of peace. If you prevail not, then, after a full and fair trial to engage them in the bonds of a sacred fellowship, with tenderness, and frankly stating your reasons, withdraw from them. It may be a costly sacrifice, but it is a necessary one.

How much more forcibly does this apply to that *one friend*, who, above all others, is dearest to the heart, and likely on that account to be more influential over the character. Where this tender engagement has been formed before the religious feeling was excited in either of the parties, it should be only a very hostile attitude against religion in one of them that should induce the other to dissolve the bond. In such a case there is sometimes little trouble, for enmity against God goes far to extinguish love towards man, and the pious party is released by the other from vows, always solemn, and never to be broken without justifiable reasons. But where no engagement of this nature *has been* formed, and the young professor is free to choose or to receive, surely, surely, a due regard to the happiness of both parties, the safety of the soul, the pursuit of salvation. the commands of Scripture, and the glory of

God, should lead to a determination never to form a connexion unfriendly to the interests of personal religion. It is impossible to conceive of anything more likely to exert a deleterious and destructive influence over incipient piety, than a cherished regard for, and an avowed engagement to, a person who is a stranger to vital godliness. Even they who have long been in the bands of matrimony and who after they have entered them are brought under the power of godliness, find it difficult to maintain it, in its vigor and consistency, against the hostile or even neutral influence of a husband or a wife that has no sympathy with them in this most momentous of all concerns. How much more unlikely is it that they who are in all the solicitudes, the emotions, and the agitations of courtship, and that in connexion with an individual who has no religious sensibilities, can hold on their way and wax stronger and stronger. It is by no means favorable to the cultivation of true godliness, in its *earliest stages*, to have the mind occupied by a subject so engrossing and so interesting to the hearts of the persons concerned as courtship, even where it is between persons both of whom are partakers of true religion. How much more, then, where this does not enter into the character and pursuits of one of the parties concerned.

VII. *The inconsistencies, shortcomings, or stationary condition of those who already make, and perhaps have long made a profession of religion*, are a great impediment to the advance of those who are just beginning the Christian life. There is a proneness on all hands, in judging of religion, to look at the conduct of those who profess it, rather than to its own inspired records. Infidels do this, and also those

who wish to be freed from its obligation, and who for that end bring against it the inconsistencies of its professors. Something like this operates also on the minds of those who are beginning the Christian course. Instead of studying their obligations in the Word of God, and taking all their ideas from thence, and finding there the proper models of character, they look around upon those Christians with whom they are acquainted, with a kind of tacit idea that if they themselves are as holy, and earnest, and spiritual as these, it is all that can be expected from them. Yea, they imagine that they who are so young in piety can hardly be supposed to be as holy, spiritual, and earnest, as they who have been long in the way. And what do they see in these older Christians, in whom at one time perhaps, they looked for an almost perfect exhibition of spiritual excellence as the natural result of long experience and rich advantages? Ah, what indeed? Oftentimes low attainments, prevailing worldly-mindedness, unsanctified tempers, and general unloveliness of character. Instead of resembling trees in the meridian of their age, lofty in stature, spreading out their branches, rich in foliage, and laden with fruit, they see stunted, almost branchless, leafless, and fruitless stocks, calling for the gardener's interdict, "Cut them down: why cumber they the ground?" Others perhaps are not in so bad a condition as this, but still far from what our Lord describes as "bearing much fruit, and so glorifying God." Here and there they discover some one in an eminent degree growing like a cedar in Lebanon, or flourishing like the palm-tree. But these are the exceptions, rather than the rule. The young inquirer, therefore, instead of looking at the exceptions, too often turns to the general rule, and

secretly thinks that *he* can hardly expect to be among the rarer instances of godliness, and contents himself with possessing the average amount of it. There may be no actual, formal, deliberate, making up his mind in this way, after general observation: but an unconscious and unintentional influence of this kind comes over his mind. It was only the day before this was written, a friend informed me of a case he knew of a young female servant who was brought under the power of religion, and wishing to be in a situation favorable to the growth of her piety, she went into a family professing godliness, where she hoped to find everything to foster her early impressions. Perhaps, as is commonly the case, she expected too much—all but perfection; but she saw so little like true religion in either master or mistress, so much worldliness, and such an absence of everything to encourage her in her recent impressions, that she found herself in almost as much danger there as in the place she left. It had nearly proved too much for her weak faith, and she had well nigh returned again to her former state of careless unconcern. However, by God's grace, she was preserved from falling, and afterwards recovered her standing and progress, though certainly not by any help she gained from this worldly-minded couple whom she served.

Against the pernicious influence of example, we must earnestly caution the young disciples. They must not allow themselves to be rendered slow in *their* pace, because others before them are so; nor to be checked in their speed, either by a false modesty which would lead them to conclude it would be presumption to pass their seniors; nor by an indolence which would but too easily lead them to be satisfied

with keeping a little behind them. No doubt it has sometimes happened that Satan has puffed up the mind of some young ardent minds, when in all the fervor of their first love, with vanity and conceit, so that they have become somewhat proud of their own ardor, and still more censorious upon the lukewarmness of others. There cannot be either a more unlovely or a more injurious disposition than for a person lately brought under the power of religion setting up for a public censor, and dealing out with unsparing hand his reflections and reproaches upon the characters and conduct of his neighbors. It is sufficiently offensive in ordinary life to hear one who is little beyond a beardless youth becoming "Sir Oracle," and presuming to scan and censure men old enough to be his fathers; but it is still more disgusting to see this in reference to religion; and we would most seriously warn all young disciples against such a temper, and admonish them to cultivate among other virtues, the charity that "doth not behave unseemly."*

* There is a very affecting and impressive illustration of the influence of professors, in the way of giving advice to a young convert, in the history of Roger Miller, that extraordinary city missionary, who was killed by a railway accident at Wolverton, in the year 1847; a most interesting memorial of whom has been published by Mr. Orme, price eighteen-pence. Soon after he became awakened to a sense of religion, and had entered into church fellowship, he opened a shop as a barber, and, like the rest of his trade, served his customers on the Sabbath. At length he considered that this was a violation of the sanctity of the Lord's-day, and he determined to close the shop and trust Providence for his support. His faith in God, however, at that time was weak, and as his business fell off, he was, as might have been expected, reduced to considerable straits in his circumstances. He sustained the trial for some months, when a fellow-professor and member of the same religious community, persuaded him to be less scrupulous. Unhappily he listened to this advice. And now mark the consequence. "In a short time after," he says impressively and instructively, "all my real enjoyment in religion, and all my desire to attend the means of grace, was gone." "To what appalling circumstances," says his biographer,

VIII. There is another hinderance to progress, which in some periods of history, and some external states of the Church of Christ, has been found fatally successful in the case of thousands—I mean *persecution.*

Persecution has not ceased, and never will, as long as society is composed of the righteous and the wicked. The Apostle's words will be found to be quite true: "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."—2 Tim. iii. 12. The essence of persecution lies in subjecting a person to injury, pain of body or mind, or some inconvenience, on account of his religious opinions or conduct, whether this be done by public unjust laws, or by private ill-treatment. If a person be made the butt of ridicule or scorn by his companions or others for his religion, he is persecuted, and is called to endure cruel mockings and reproaches. Perhaps there is nothing more hard to bear than this: no test of steadfastness more severe. A young man who becomes pious, if in a large establishment, is sure to be the object of all kinds of unhallowed mirth and sport, and if amidst all he remains firm, inflexible, and constant, is as truly a confessor as he who goes to prison. It is scarcely possible to conceive of a harder trial of constancy than this. Many have given way. They could not stand it; and have escaped the pitiless storm of ridicule by taking shelter in apostasy. And where they have not altogether abandoned their religion, have "put the candle under a bushel," and concealed their opinions and

"does one false step give rise. In his case many dark years of open apostasy and extreme irreligion and vice ensued, and innumerable troubles, both spiritual and temporal, ensued from this single act." And all must be traced up to that fatal advice of a professing Christian. Oh, professors, take heed what counsel you give, as well as what examples you set, to young converts.

feelings, so that to others they appeared to have given them up. This is as truly denying Christ as open apostasy; and is the very case to which he alludes when he says, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father with his holy angels."—Mark viii. 38. Christ will have no *secret* disciples. He that has faith must confess it before men.—Rom. x. 9–11. In many cases it may be well, where the opposition is too hard to be borne, to quit the situation—though it is a noble instance of moral heroism to endure it bravely, "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might."

But there are other cases, in some respects more trying than even this, I mean where a young person, especially a female, becomes decided in spiritual religion in the midst of an ungodly family; where not one is found to countenance her, and all oppose her. She cannot do many things she once did without scruple or hesitation. Some of their amusements offend her conscience, and she declines them. She is now considered by her strictness as condemning all the rest, and is reproached as an accuser and reprover of the family, not excepting her parents. She is charged with being a divider of the household, and as having introduced discord and strife. It is a most trying situation for the object of persecution to endure the anger and meet the frowns of father and mother, brothers and sisters; to be considered and reproached as the disturber of the peace of a once happy and united family—what firmness of principle, what inflexibility of purpose, what martyr-like constancy, what a power of divine grace does this require.

And even where the opposition is not so fierce as in either of these cases, it may be so considerable as to be a great trial of constancy and a powerful hinderance to progress. There may be the threatened withdrawment of patronage, favor, friendship, or custom; and the mild expostulation and the gentle entreaty, which are a persecution of love. How difficult to put aside all this and go on. Instead of this, many are themselves turned aside and go back. Their courage fails, their love of ease gains the ascendency, and they surrender their convictions, their hopes, their prospects—in short, their religion.

Let those who are thus tempted consider the consequences of giving up their profession. Let them read with solemn awe the passages of Scripture already quoted. For their encouragement let them take up their Bibles, and read our Lord's words in his sermon on the mount, Matt. v. 10–18. Let them also peruse the beautiful language of the apostle, 1 Pet. 19–24—iv. 12–19; 2 Tim. ii. 11–13; Heb. xii. 1–13. Let them wrestle with God for his grace to assist them, and cast themselves upon his promised aid, expecting that he will uphold them. It should be accounted by them an honor and a glory to suffer for Christ. They should bear all with patience, meekness, and forgiveness. A quiet and gentle sufferer will in most cases subdue even the hard-hearted oppressor. There is a wonderous power in consistent and unvarying meekness. Let not opposition then hinder you. Let your courage rise with your circumstances: your self-denial keep pace with both: and your humility and sense of dependence upon God deepen with the pressure of opposition upon your strength.

IX. *A taste for worldly amusements* will inevitably prove, wherever it is indulged, a powerful obstacle to growth in grace. Man is unquestionably made for enjoyment. He has a capacity for bliss, an instinctive appetite for gratification, and for this God has made ample provision of a healthful and lawful kind. "*A taste for pleasure*" means something different from this; or at any rate, it means this directed to wrong sources, or carried to an excess. Now there are some amusements which in their very nature are so utterly incompatible with true religion, that a liking for them, and a hankering after them, and especially an indulgence in them, cannot comport with real, earnest, and serious piety. The convivial parties of the glutton and the drunkard; the passion for the gambling-table; the pleasures of the race-course, and the performances of the theater, are all of this kind. A taste for them is utterly uncongenial with a spirit of godliness. So is a love for the gay and fashionable entertainments of the ball-room, and the routs and parties of genteel life. These are all unfriendly to religion, and are usually renounced by persons intent upon the momentous concerns of eternity. A love for them dies out from the soul agitated and made anxious by the great question, "What shall I do to be saved?" We would not doom to perdition all who are at any time found in this round of worldly-pleasure: but we unhesitatingly say, that a *taste* for them is entirely opposed to the whole genius of Christianity. They are all included in that "world" which is overcome by faith and the new birth. Religion is, though a happy, a very *serious* thing, and can no more live and flourish in the heated atmosphere of those parties, than could

a plant brought from the frigid or temperate zone under the burning rays of a tropical sun. But in this pleasure-loving, pleasure-seeking, and pleasure-inventing age, there is a great variety of amusements perpetually rising up, which it would be impossible to say are sinful, and therefore unlawful. Yet the supposition of their lawfulness viewed in connexion with their abundance, variety, and constant repetition, is the very thing that makes them dangerous to the spirit of true religion. A taste for even *lawful* worldly amusements, which leads its possessor to be *fond* of them, seeking them, and longing for them, shows a mind that is in a very doubtful state as to vital piety. It looks as if he had not yet entered into the Saviour's words to the woman of Samaria, "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst, but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life." —John iv. 13, 14. Now this *thirsting* after worldly pleasure of any kind would seem as if the subject of it had not yet drank of the living water from the well of salvation. This anxiety after even *innocent worldly gratification* seems to indicate that the peace which passeth all understanding had not yet taken possession of the soul; and this inquiry, "Who will show us any good?" hardly comports with a mind that had said to God, "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased."—Psalm iv. 6–7.

I do not like to be asked, as I sometimes am, the question, "whether such and such amusements

are compatible with religion?" That is, I do not like it, when it evidently proceeds from a prevailing wish to enjoy them, and a desire to get ministerial sanction for indulging in them. It ought not to be necessary to prove that many of these are unlawful, they should be found unnecessary.*

After all, it is freely admitted that religion is not hostile to anything which is not hostile to *it:* that many things which are not religion, though not opposed to it, may be lawfully enjoyed by the Christian: that what he has to do in *this* matter is not to practise total abstinence, but moderation: yet he should remember how elastic a term "moderation" is, and to be vigilant lest his moderation should continually increase its latitude till it has swelled into the imperial tyranny of an appetite which acknowledges no authority, and submits to no restraint.

* I am aware that it is sometimes pleaded on behalf of worldly amusements by young people, that abstinence from them represents piety as clothed with austerity, and as a species of penance, and that religious people should go as far as they could in these things to disprove the calumny. There is something perhaps in this; but it requires to be very narrowly watched. For, without caution, see how far it would carry us. They who indulge in pleasures which no religious person could ever engage in may say that *all* persons must have a very melancholy religion who debar themselves of *their* pleasures. So that an excessive repugnance to *all* amusements, and the repugnance may, I concede, be excessive and almost ridiculous, should not be so beaten down as to make way for a latitude which would be dangerous to personal godliness. A Christian is not to partake of the pleasures of the world to prove that his religion does not debar him from enjoyment; but he is to let it be seen by his "peace that passeth understanding," and his "joy unspeakable and full of glory," that his religion gives far more enjoyment than it takes away: that, in fact, it gives him the truest happiness. The way to win a worldly person to religion is not to go and partake of his amusements, but to prove to him that we are happier with our pleasures than he is with his; that we bask in sunshine while he has only a smoking taper; that we have found the "river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and the Lamb," while he is drinking of the muddy streams which issue from the earth.

ADDRESS TO THE READER.

If in an important mission, journey, or undertaking of any kind, you were impeded in reference to the object contemplated, you would inquisitively and anxiously search for the cause of delay, and never rest satisfied till you had found and removed it. I am now supposing there is a hinderance of one or more kinds to your progress towards heaven, to your increase of faith and holiness. There are stones in the way to be gathered out. It is a fearful idea to think of hinderances to heaven, impediments to holiness. If there were anything that hindered your health, or prosperity in business, or the success of any earthly scheme whatever, how earnestly you would ask the question, "What is it; what is it?" How thankful you would be to the friend who pointed it out, and how diligently you would set to work to take it out of the way. Well, there are impediments in your way to Zion. You are hindered. You do not perhaps make progress. How is this?—I say to you what the apostle did to the Galatians, "Who did hinder you," or what? Look back through this chapter; take up every particular; say of each, Is it this, or this, that stops my progress? I ask you, and I implore you to ask yourself—

Is it indifference to the subject?

Is it the unsubdued corruption of your nature, left to itself, unresisted, unmortified?

Is it an easily-besetting sin?

Is it one of the mistakes mentioned in the last chapter?

Is it the peculiarity of your situation being unfriendly to a life of piety?

Is it unsuitable companionship?
Is it the inconsistencies of professing Christians?
Is it a taste for worldly amusements.
Is it persecution?
Examine, I beseech you, examine, what it is that arrests you in your course, and take it away. Again I say, "Gather out the stones."

CHAPTER VI.

MOTIVES TO PROGRESS.

It might be supposed it would be its own motive. Who need to be admonished to proceed in a course on which they have entered, which leads to wealth? Do the men who have gone to the gold fields, and who have begun to find the precious metal, need to be stimulated to go forward? And yet we *do* find that even in relation to some earthly objects of pursuit, and valuable ones, too, where self-denial, sacrifice, and surrender of present gratification for future benefit is required, much persuasion is sometimes necessary to keep the person in continuous exertion for the attainment of the desired good. If he has lost his health by excess in the indulgence of appetite, either in the way of eating, drinking, or any other lust of the flesh, and by medicine and moderate diet, and other restraints, he is beginning to recover, how necessary in some cases, is perpetual exhortation, to induce him to refrain from excess, and to persevere in the denial of his appetite. How earnest we must be in setting before him all the motives which ought

to have weight with him in leading him to abstain from whatever is injurious to his health. So is it in religion. A person just commencing his attention to this momentous concern has so many hinderances both from within and without to stop his progress, that he needs to be urged forward by the voice of affectionate entreaty. He must be appealed to by all that can be brought to bear upon his judgment, heart, and conscience. He is like a man just awaking out of a deep and heavy slumber, about whom the drowsiness still hangs, and who is strongly inclined to fall back again upon his pillow and relapse into stupor. You must speak loudly to him, and even shake him with some degree of violence, and compel him to rouse himself and keep himself awake. Such is really the condition of a recently awakened sinner. I now therefore present the motives which apply to his case for making progress.

1. And the first I bring forward is the one just suggested, *the danger of declension.* I may even add to this the *proneness* to declension. The progress of the sinner is like that of a stone rolling *down* hill, which has a continual tendency to go of itself, and by every revolution to increase its speed and momentum : that of a believer is the progress of a stone up hill, which has not only a considerable *vis inertiæ* to be overcome by great effort, but which when this effort is suspended tends to roll back again. The stone in either case does not, cannot stand still, but by the laws of matter and motion must keep going backward, unless prevented by actual effort. This is impressive, and deserves very serious consideration. If the young disciple does not advance, he will in all probability retrograde.

Declension after we have once made a profession,

or have been awakened to solicitude, is really a very fearful thing. It is most affecting and alarming to see a person once deeply convinced of sin, seriously anxious about salvation, professedly obtaining peace through faith in Christ, and commencing a course of practical godliness, either falling again into sin or sinking into predominant worldliness. Has not this sad spectacle been often witnessed? Have we not seen this in persons who at one time seemed to have such love to Christ that it might have been fitly called the *love* of their espousals? They scarcely wished for any other pleasure than that which was enjoyed in communion with himself and with his saints; his name was as ointment poured forth; and they loved his very image. The exercises of private prayer, the perusal of the Holy Scriptures, and the public ordinances of the sanctuary were waited for with eager expectation. The company of those only who were like-minded was selected, and the promotion of the cause of God was the enterprise which most interested them. They had often made solemn resolutions before the Lord, and had often said, "*Thy vows, O God, are upon me.*" And what, and where were they afterwards? Alas, how changed! All their former resolutions were broken, and all their habits changed. Their first love subsided into lukewarmness, and at last into absolute coldness and indifference. Prayer was restrained; public worship neglected; the Bible never opened; the company of the saints forsaken; the love of pleasure gained the ascendancy; and in some cases, open sins that had been forsaken, were again practised. The poor backslider himself sometimes has conscience enough left to be made miserable by its re-

proaches and stings, while they who had formerly known him in his better days, lament over his change, and exclaim in bitterness of heart, "Alas, how fallen." The sins of such a person have peculiar aggravations. They are committed after the most solemn vows and engagements; and against clearer light. They are without any provocation on the part of God. "What iniquity," said God to the Jews, "have your fathers found in me that they are gone far from me?"—Jer. ii. 5. A question which is addressed also to every backslider, and which ought to cut him to the very soul, and stir every spring of sensibility and self-abhorrence. Did the backslider find him a hard Master? Was the way of obedience a rugged path, through a barren wilderness and a land of drought? Sins after profession are attended with circumstances of peculiar and horrid ingratitude. After God has poured out upon us his Spirit, taken us by the hand, and led us to repentance and the beginning of a religious course, *then* to turn away from him, and refuse any longer to be under his guidance, how basely thankless is all this! Such departures from God are expressive of the most extreme and singular *folly* as well as wickedness. They who commit them, once professed to be happy in serving the Lord. They had seemed to have found rest in Christ. They were no longer running up and down in the world, saying, "Who will show us any good," but had found happiness in religion. Their judgment was convinced; their heart was satisfied; their conscience was quiet; their whole soul was at peace. But now by turning back again to sin or to the world, they cast all this away. And they cannot now enjoy the pleasures of sin or the world as they

once did. They sometimes feel they have made a foolish bargain, and have exchanged liberty for drudgery and slavery; fears of conscience for bitter. remorse; joyfulness of heart for sorrow and anguish It is a being weary of the government of the Prince of peace, whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light, and putting their necks under the iron yoke of Satan, which crushes them to destruction.

Such conduct also causes the ways of godliness to be spoken ill of. It has the same effect upon many as the ill report of the spies who were sent to survey the land of Canaan, which discouraged the people, caused them to murmur and rebel, and was the occasion of their perishing in the wilderness. The backslider thus perpetrates a double mischief, his conduct is infectious and tends to corrupt those who already believe, while it discourages those who do not. It says to them, "I have tried the paths of wisdom, and do not find her paths as I was told and expected, to be paths of pleasantness and peace." This is a fearful contradiction of God's word, an awful calumny upon religion, and in effect an impious blasphemy against God. Such is the sin of declension and backsliding, and if it go on to apostasy, then how fearful! Read what the apostle has said on this subject.—Heb. vi. 5–9. Let every young disciple turn to the passage, read the words, and tremble. And no less solemn is the language of the apostle Peter, 2 Epistle, ii. 21–22.

It is not only possible, but probable, that some who shall read this work, will be found by it in various stages of declension already: some who have consciousness enough of their situation, and even occasional regret enough to borrow the poet's lament—

"Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord;
Where is the soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus and his Word?

"What peaceful hours I once enjoyed,
How sweet their memory still;
But they have left an aching void
The world can never fill."

To such I would say, instantly take alarm and tremble at your danger. Let the words of God sound like thunder in your ears, "If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." He will be a man whom God ceases to regard with approbation. His displeasure, instead of his complacency, rests upon him. He marks every footstep backward with reproach and disgust. Can you bear to think of this? "Can your heart endure and your hands be strong" in such a situation? Perhaps the declension is yet slight, only like a speck of disease, like the beginning of consumption, curable if taken in time, but fatal if suffered to go on to after-stages. But in whatever degree the declension may have taken place, it should excite solicitude and lead to immediate efforts for recovery. The counsel delivered by our Lord to the church at Ephesus should be hearkened to with solemnity, and followed without delay; "Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent and do thy first works." It is not enough to *know* that you are declining; nor merely to *lament* it. Complaining alone will not effect a cure. We may sigh and go backward to the last period of our lives. Our chief solicitude must be to recover lost ground. In order to this there must be deep contrition and profound humiliation before God. In such a state we must begin as we did originally, with conviction of sin. The backslider must return through the valley of humiliation. There

is no other way back for the wanderer. It will be well to inquire diligently after the cause of the declension. What was it that led you astray? Here begin in the way of return. The point where you left the road, is of course the point at which you must return to it. If it were a sin of neglect, instantly take up the omitted duty. If it were a sin of practice, immediately put it away. It will perhaps be somewhat difficult to recover your standing; for as we have said, declension is a down-hill progress, but the way of return is all up-hill. You will perhaps be ashamed, afraid, and somewhat reluctant, to go back. He who ungratefully and ungenerously quits a friend, feels some shyness and backwardness to return, and say, "I have sinned, forgive me?" So is it with the backslider towards God. But mark his love, where, even to backsliding Israel, who had so often gone away from him, he said, "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto him, take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves (offerings) of our lips. I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him."—Hosea xiv, 1, 2, 4. And to convince you how ready God is to receive you, let me refer you to that wonderfully pathetic passage, where God is represented as a loving father, overhearing the confession and lamentation of his penitent child, and lavishing upon him the fondness of his paternal heart. Jer. xxxi. 18–20. What heart can stand out against the melting pathos of this wonderful passage? What backslider need now fear to return to the Lord?

II. It should be most impressively felt that

progression is *commanded and expected by God.* We now refer you back to the commands which are given in the second chapter; and would especially fix your attention on those which enjoin you to seek after *perfection.* This is a subject which a young Christian should thoroughly understand, but which few *do* either understand or consider. Misconceptions on this subject are fatal to growth. The verb, "be perfect," and the noun, "perfection," are of such frequent occurrence in the New Testament, that the subject to which they refer ought to engage the close and serious attention of every professing Christian. There can be no doubt that these terms are sometimes employed by the sacred writers in a *comparative* sense, as signifying high degrees—eminence—completeness of parts. In Hebrews vi. 1, perfection signifies the more sublime, enlarged, spiritual, and complete views of Christian doctrine, as opposed to first principles. In 1 Cor. ii. 6—Phil. iii. 15, "to be perfect," means to be far advanced in knowledge. But there are other places where it is unquestionably to be understood in its unqualified sense, as intending absolute and sinless perfection, such are 2 Cor. vii. 1.—"Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." So again Heb. xiii. 21—"Make you perfect in every good work." There can be no doubt that in these passages the apostle means entire freedom from sin, an absolutely spotless holiness.

"The apostle does not say," to quote the comment of Barnes, "that this perfection has ever been attained, or is attainable, in this world; nor does he say that it has not been. He only urges the obligation to

make an effort to be entirely holy; and this obligation is not affected by the inquiry whether any one has been, or has not been, perfect. It is an obligation which results from the nature of the law of God, and his unchangeable claims upon the soul. The fact that no one has been perfect does not relax the claim; the fact that no one will be perfect in this life, does not weaken the obligation: it proves only the deep and dreadful depravity of the human heart, and should humble us under the stubbornness of guilt. The obligation to be perfect is one that is eternal and unchangeable. The unceasing and steady aim of every Christian should be perfection—perfection in all things—in the love of God, of Christ, of man; perfection of feeling, words, and plans, and dealings with man; perfection in prayers and submission to the will of God. No man can be a Christian who does not sincerely desire it, and who does not constantly aim at it. No man is a friend of God who can acquiesce in a state of sin, and who is satisfied and contented that he is not as holy as God is holy. And any man who has no desire to be perfect as God is, and who does not make it his daily study and constant aim to be perfect as God is perfect, may set it down as demonstratively certain that he has no true religion. How can a man be a Christian who is willing to acquiesce in a state of sin, and who does not desire to be just like his Master and Lord?"

This is strong and impressive language, and requires the very devout, serious, and solemn consideration of all who are beginning the divine life, as showing them what is to be their aim, their study, and their endeavor—even to be perfect in every good work. Young converts *see* no perfection

in others; they hear it said by Christians there *is* no perfection; they feel none in themselves; and therefore never dream that it is their duty to seek after it; and thus reconciling themselves to all kinds and degrees of imperfections, begin and continue with a very low state of religion. I believe that infinite mischief is done to the souls of men; that the profession of godliness is much disparaged and dishonored: and the lustre of the church dimmed; by a prevalent forgetfulness, and in some quarters a denial that it is our duty to go on unto perfection. Many are tolerating all kinds and degrees of imperfection, under the plea that none are absolutely perfect. Young disciples have been taught as one of their first lessons in theology, that as absolute perfection is not attained in this life, it is useless to seek after it, and that they may be very good Christians, even while not only possessing but indulging many known corruptions. I would not for the world be misunderstood; I would not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. I would not say anything to cast a stumbling-block in the way of the feeblest lamb in all the flock of Christ; and yet I would be equally solicitous to guard them against self-deception. What I say then, is this, not that all imperfections are evidence of an unconverted state, but that the intentional indulgence of them, knowing them to *be* such, under the notion that a great amount of imperfection is compatible with a state of grace, is so. Not that the possession of perfection is essential as an evidence of sincerity, but a *desire* and pursuit after it.

III. Progress is *a bright evidence of sincerity.* Growth, as we have already remarked, is the proof

of life. Dead things do not grow. There are few minds among professors of religion in which the question *does* not, and none in which it *ought* not, with deep anxiety, sometimes to arise, "Am I, or am I not, a child of God?"

Now surely the transition from death to life; the change from an unregenerate to a converted state; the ceasing to be an enemy to God by wicked works, and becoming his child by filial love and obedience, cannot be a change of so trivial, superficial, and undistinguishable a nature as not to be ascertained without great difficulty. It might be supposed to be easily recognised where it really exists. True it is, that the change is in some cases more marked than in others. Where the conversion is sudden, and is a turning from actual vice, or awful infidelity, or even from flagrant heresy, it is more apparent, and more easily determined by consciousness, than where it is the *gradual* formation of religious character in persons previously correct in their general conduct, and brought up under religious instruction. It is in these latter cases that doubts and fears about sincerity must be expected more frequently and painfully to occur. It is, therefore, in these cases that progress is indispensable as an evidence of sincerity. For it must be recollected that even in these, growth is as essential to life as in the others. Grace never finds in nature a subject for which there is need of little to be done. There may be very beautiful wild flowers blooming, or very good fruits growing in the wilderness, yet even these can be carried on to much higher beauty, and much richer flavor, by the culture of the green-house and the hot-house. When the young disciple can say,

"True, I have not to compare, as the effect of God's converting grace, a virtuous with a vicious life. I have not to contrast a present pious belief with a former blaspheming infidelity. But I find an increasing loosening from many of my former tastes. The love of worldly-pleasure, which even at my commencement of a religious life was strong in me, is evidently weakened, and I find piety more and more the source of my happiness. If a growing conscientiousness to avoid little sins, and to practise small duties, be a proof of sincerity, I rejoice to say I have this. As regards besetting sins, I have reason to believe these are far more mortified than they were, and temptations to them have less power over me. My temper, once so irritable and impetuous, is subdued; and I find it more easy to govern my tongue. My prejudices towards those who differ from me in religious opinions have been softened by the influence of Christian charity. If these things be evidence of sincerity, I am no self-deceiver; for I can certainly perceive in myself these marks of progress."

Here I will present a passage of Holy Scripture, which it is of importance every young disciple should "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest." The apostle Peter thus exhorts, "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure."—2 Peter i. 10. The things to be made sure are our "calling and election." God's choice of us, manifested by his converting us; in other words, our spiritual character and spiritual safety. To make this sure, or certain, cannot have reference to God, for no act of ours can make more certain anything he does. Nor can it refer to the things themselves, for if a man be really

chosen and called of God, nothing that he can do can make these more certain. It must therefore refer to ourselves. God treats us as rational and moral agents, and what may be absolutely certain in his mind, from his mere purpose that it shall be so, is to be proved to us only by evidence and the free exercise of our own powers. The meaning therefore of this passage is, that we are to obtain evidence that this is our condition. And how are we to obtain it? The celebrated Cudworth, in his Sermon on the text, "Hereby do we know that we know him if we keep his commandments," has the following remarks upon the passage from St. Peter, which I am now considering: "He that builds all his comfort upon an ungrounded persuasion that God from all eternity hath loved him, and absolutely decreed him to life and happiness, and seeketh not for God really dwelling in his soul, builds his house upon a quicksand, and it shall suddenly sink and be swallowed up. We are nowhere commanded to pry into these secrets, but the wholesome counsel and advice given us is this, '*to make our calling and election sure.*' We have no warrant in Scripture to peep into these hidden rolls and volumes of eternity, and to make it the first thing we do, when we come to Christ, to spell out our names in the stars, and to persuade ourselves that we are certainly elected to everlasting happiness, before we see the image of God in righteousness and true holiness shaped in our hearts. God's everlasting decree is too dazzling and bright an object for us at first to set our eyes upon. It is far easier and safer for us to look upon the rays of his goodness and holiness, as they are reflected in our hearts, and there to read the mild and gentle

characters of God's love to us, in our love to him, and our hearty compliance with Heaven's will; as it is safer for us, if we would see the sun, to look upon it here below in a pail of water, than to cast up our daring eyes to the body of the sun itself, which is too radiant and scorching for us. The best assurance any one can have of his interest in God, is doubtless the conformity of his soul to him. When our heart is once turned into a conformity with the mind of God; when we feel our will conformed to his will, we shall then presently perceive a spirit of adoption within ourselves, teaching us to say *Abba, Father*. We shall not then care for peeping into those hidden records of eternity, to see whether our names are written there in golden characters; no, we shall find a copy of God's thoughts concerning us written in our own breasts. There we may read the character of his favor towards us; there we may feel an inward sense of his love to us, flowing out of our hearty and unfeigned love to him. And we shall be more undoubtedly persuaded of it, than if any of those winged watchers above, that are prying to heaven's secrets, should come and tell us that they saw our names enrolled in those volumes of eternity."

IV. *Progress is its own reward.* From what infelicity is the advancing Christian protected. He has not the unhappiness which in many, if not in most cases, declension brings upon its subject. But as pain is still a sign of life, though a suffering one, even this is better than the insensibility of death. In the case just mentioned, the individual still retains some considerable tenderness of conscience, some religious sensibility, without being supposed to be hankering after the amusements of the world; but

I am now speaking of those who are almost entirely dead to religious feeling and strongly inclined to gaiety, yet in some measure held in check by the last lingering remains of religion. They are still professors, but find their profession only a clog and a hinderance to their pleasures. They see its inconsistency with their tastes and occasional enjoyments, and find it as a drop of bitter in their cup of gratification. Sometimes they wish they had never *made* a profession of religion. They are morose and ill-tempered with themselves for ever thinking of being Christians, and till they are led to abandon it altogether, which at length they are brought to do, they are checked by it, much to their annoyance, in their course. This is a wretched state of mind, it spoils its possessor both for the world and for religion.

But these are only the *negative side* of the pleasure of growth: we turn therefore to the *positive*. And here we would remark, that progress in anything on which we have set our hearts, is always agreeable: and this applies especially to religion. Viewed in its true nature, it unites the highest dignity with the purest pleasure. Her ways are ways, not only of pleasure and paths of peace, but of honor and renown. Can anything be loftier, nobler, sublimer, than a growing conformity to the image of God? To see a stronger and a stronger resemblance to God in our soul? To behold the moral attributes of the Divine nature fixed with a deeper and a deeper coloring on the character: what to this is the pleasure of the artist in seeing the correct likeness of some great monarch, or some wonderful genius, growing under his hand upon the canvas? How exalted is the pleasure of religion, it is the bliss of angels, the happiness of

spirits made perfect, yea, the joy of God's own heart. It is enjoyed under the smile of conscience, and conscience is undoubtedly the great repository and magazine of all those pleasures that can afford any solid refreshment to the soul. When this is calm, serene, and smiling, then the man perfectly enjoys all things, and what is more, himself, for that he must do before he can enjoy anything else. It is a pleasure that never satiates nor wearies. Can the lover of wordly pleasure say this? With him how short is the interval between a pleasure and a burden.

But we may descend to a few details. How delightful is it to grow in knowledge. With what a passion for this are some minds possessed. And if such be the value of secular knowledge, how much greater the worth of that which is divine. Can anything be more delightful than to be ever finding out some new meanings, some fresh beauties in the Word of God? For the spiritual astronomer to discover some new star in the firmament of inspiration; or for the spiritual botanist to light on some new flower in the fields of revelation?

But take also the trio of graces set forth by the apostle—FAITH, HOPE, CHARITY: and here again we say, to grow in each and all of these is to advance in happiness. FAITH is the first source of all true joy to the Christian. "In whom believing," says the apostle, "we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." Faith looks abroad upon the whole field of revelation, in all of whose facts, doctrines, precepts, invitations, and promises, it finds so many separate objects of delight. But it concentrates its attention on Christ and heaven. It looks with wonder, gratitude, and love, on the cross, and then passes on with similar feelings to the

crown of glory. To grow in faith is therefore to grow in bliss, and to put up the prayer, "Lord, increase our faith," is only in other words to say, "Lord, increase our happiness." Here we see the reason why so many professing Christians go mourning all their days—their faith is so weak: and it is of momentous consequence for every young Christian at his very outset in the divine life to understand that faith is the branch, of which joy is the blossom, and holiness the fruit. Much the same strain of remark may be made in reference to HOPE. It is easy to see that all hope must be pleasant from its very nature. This is the case with even worldly expectations. Poets have sung "The Pleasures of Hope," and experience has justified and echoed the strain. The apostle in describing the Christian state of mind in reference to this object, speaks of it as "Rejoicing in hope."—Rom. xii. 12. Which is but a repetition of what he had said before, "And rejoice in hope of the glory of God."—v. 2.

CHARITY, or LOVE, is another of the component parts of religion mentioned by the apostle, to advance in which is to advance in happiness. GOD IS LOVE, and He is also the blessed God; and He is the blessed God, because He is love. It is impossible it should be otherwise. All the malevolent feelings are productive of misery to the subject of them. For this reason, Satan, whose nature is unmixed malignity, must be the subject of unmixed misery. No happiness can dwell in that bosom from which all benevolence is expelled; while no misery can be found in that breast from which all malevolence is cast out. Perfect love casteth out, not only fear, but wretchedness. Let any one read the description of love in the epistle to

the Corinthians, and say if the grace there described must not contain the very elements of bliss. And is not growth in holiness equally delightful? Holiness is our spiritual health, as sin is our disease. How beautiful and how well worthy our attention and adoption for ourselves was the prayer of the apostle for Gaius: "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth."—3 John, 2. Health, and especially growing health, is one of the most delightful sensations we can experience. To feel the tide of energy flow back to its forsaken channel, and the depressed frame become, amidst the beauties of nature and the breezes of heaven, more and more buoyant, the step more elastic, the appetite more keen, and the power of exertion more vigorous. This is to experience in some cases almost a type of the resurrection. But even this does not equal the joy of growing in grace, of returning and increasing spiritual health.

V. *It adds to the credit and redounds to the honor of religion generally.* It is given out to the world, and the world knows it, that increase is one part of the Christian's duty and profession. Our phraseology and the language of Scripture are well known to those who are not pious, and who make no pretensions to be so. They hear us preach, and pray, and talk, about growth in grace; about our light shining more and more unto the perfect day; about our running the Christian race; and other matters of a like kind; they very naturally take us at our word, and knowing that all these figures of speech import progress, they look for it, and expect to see it, and are disappointed if they do *not* see it: and when they observe those inconsistencies, which prove that we

are either not going forward, but ever going back, they taunt us with the sarcasm, "Where is your advancement?" "Is this your growth?" "Is it thus you improve?" In all other matters, or most others, they *do* see it in this world's affairs, and ought to see it in religion. It adds to the credit of any system of medical practice, or of any individual practitioner, when under their treatment the health of the patient is restored: so also it redounds to the honor of a school-master or a teacher of any kind when his pupils make great and rapid advance in what they are taught. While on the contrary, it discredits either or both of these, when there is no improvement. And must it not be the same with religion? Yet is there no occasion given by the conduct of many for some such reflections on the part of worldly people as these: "Every system which professes to lead onward those who are under it, proves its excellence for this purpose by its results. And in most we do see a manifest advance in those who place themselves under it. We see boys growing in knowledge at school; apprentices advancing in acquaintance with their business; and young tradesmen becoming more and more clever in secular affairs. It *ought*, of course, to be so in religion. The people who profess it have the Bible in their own hands; they go to church or chapel every Sunday with great regularity; they take the sacrament; and in many other things make great ado about their religion. Now with all these means, opportunities, and advantages, for personal improvement and spiritual culture, what manner of persons *ought* they to be. These people tell us that it is one of their principles to grow in grace. What evident, conspicuous improvement ought therefore to be

seen in them? And yet really religion seems to be almost the only thing in which men do *not* make progress, if we may judge by their conduct. What increase of knowledge may take place in their minds we cannot tell, nor how often they pray in their families or in their closets, but forming our opinions by their outward conduct and visible character, the light of holiness does not shine brighter and brighter before men. We have known some of them many years, and have watched them closely, though not unfairly, much less malignantly, but we must confess we see very little, if any improvement in them. Nay, in some things, they have even gone back, and are worse than they were when they first made a profession of religion."

Dreadful reproach! Alas, alas, how *just* in application to some, as well as dreadful! Let it be the deep solicitude of every one who has the least regard for the honor and credit of the gospel to roll this reproach away, by presenting a character in which all the beauties of holiness shall be continually coming out in bolder and more striking relief. How would it raise not only the gospel, but the church of Christ, in public estimation, if men looked up to it as a school where the pupils were ever studying how to advance in all that can make them acceptable to God, and useful to man. What reverence would it secure for the minister of the gospel, and what respect for his ministrations, if by him and by others, it were seen that all who profess to have been converted by his preaching, were beheld engaged in an arduous struggle against all that is evil, and continually making attainments in all that is good.

VI. And is it not a powerful motive to grow in

grace—to consider that our present attainments in true religion, *have a connection with, and will have an influence upon, our heavenly and eternal state.* There is a much closer relation between our present selves in this world, and our future selves in the next, than most persons are aware of. "What a man soweth, that shall he also reap;" both in quality and quantity. It is not possible to set out in the Christian profession with a more instructive or impressive idea than this—*life is the seed time for eternity.* It is a common way to think of heaven and hell, as if they were two states where all are alike happy in the one, or miserable in the other, whatever may have been their attainments in holiness, or their deeds of wickedness. That all the righteous will be in heaven, and that all will be perfectly happy there, is quite true. As regards the *general* sources of heavenly felicity, these will be open alike to all; but this does not suppose that in many *particulars*, there will not be an endless variety. We know too little of the future state to specify these matters; we walk by faith. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." There are, no doubt, innumerable sources of delight, and varieties of employment, of which we can now form no more conception than we can of the exercises and pleasures of a sixth sense. There may, and in all probability will be social gradations of rank; diversities of post, place, and service; and higher and lower degrees of honorable distinction. For these a proportionate and diversified fitness may be required. One man may be more qualified for some high place and honorable service in the heavenly world than another; and that which constitutes the qualification for this higher place, may be, not so much great *intellectual*

powers in our earthly state, but more eminent piety. It is not the man of large yet unsanctified understanding, that is qualified for heaven, but the man of sanctified heart. It is moral and spiritual excellence that is the meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light. And whatever may be the measure of his intellectual capacity, he is the *most* meet for it, who is most holy. If this be true, many an eminently holy peasant or artizan, will be higher in glory than the less holy philosopher or scholar; and many a youthful Christian cut off in the morning of his days, but carried away in the full blossom of distinguished piety, be found more qualified to serve God in some high place above, than the aged professor of low and small degrees of personal godliness. Is it to be conceived God will deal out as much commendation upon even an eminent Christian, as upon a martyr or an apostle? Or, to take a more ordinary case, upon the very feeble and too worldly-minded professor, who may be after all a sincere Christian, as upon the spiritually-minded, heavenly, self-denying, and consistent one?

But the sources of our heavenly bliss will not be all from without, but also from within. Even on earth, "a good man is satisfied from himself." He carries, in his holy dispositions, the springs of his own felicity about with him. And so will it be in heaven. It is not only *where*, and *with whom*, we shall be, but *what* we shall be, that will make us happy. And eminent piety here will, in all likelihood, prepare us for a larger capacity of holiness and happiness there. The holiness and happiness of the least saint in heaven will be as perfect as that of the highest archangel, or the chief of the apostles: but the capacity for *this perfection* may, and must be,

immeasurably larger in the one case than the other? A tea-cup may be as full to overflowing as a cistern, yet how much greater is the fulness in the one case than in the other? Here then is the connection not only of a *state* of grace, but of the actings of grace with a state of glory. It is not only that one leads to the other; not only that one prepares for the other; but that one is *proportionate* to the other. It is probable that there is not one holy act, or motive, or desire, or volition of our whole lives, that has not some bearing upon our eternal character and happiness. God deals with us as regards another world, not only according to our *state*, whether we are righteous or wicked, but according to our *actings* in that state.

ADDRESS TO THE READER.

Is your heart susceptible of the power of a motive to anything? Is there aught below or above the skies that *can* move you? Do you really know what a motive means? If so, surely, surely, you must feel the force of these I have now presented. Must not the stone of an unrenewed heart remain in your soul unchanged to flesh, if you are insensible to the power and attractions of these inducements? If these things fail to impress you and impel you, you would remain stationary and indifferent beneath a voice or a vision from heaven, or a messenger from the burning pit. If these things do not stimulate you, I should despair of the power of an angel's harp or a demon's groan. Are you on reading these pages at all excited to *desire* to advance? Say, does the fire kindle, does the glow diffuse throughout your soul at the idea of

what is here presented? If not, let me try again, not by new motives, but by recalling those which are here enumerated.

Does not the dread of declension, backsliding, apostasy, terrify you?

Shall not the command of God impel you?

Will not the hope of gaining a sweet and blessed evidence of sincerity, lead you to seek after progress?

Does not the experience you have already had, though it may be in a small degree, of the reward which advancement yields, induce you to go forward?

And then what shall be said of the fact that our degrees of grace will regulate our degrees of glory? Has this no motive power for your soul? What, so dull, so earthly, so insensible to the felicities, honors, and distinctions of heaven, as to feel little holy ambition to have some high place there?

CHAPTER VII.

ENCOURAGEMENTS TO PROGRESS.

There is, perhaps, no greater hinderance on the part of some than a desponding fear of ever getting forward in the divine life. They see so much in themselves that is imperfect—such ignorance, such corruption, such lukewarmness; so much in their situation and circumstances that is opposed to their advancement; so much of stagnancy or declension in others, that seems to render it unlikely that *they* shall succeed better than their friends and acquaint-

ances; so much that renders it unnecessary, as they suppose, for them ever to wish for it; that they give it up in hopeless depression. "Ah," they say, "it is indeed a desirable thing to grow in grace. Happy are they who can realize so covetable a condition of soul. I often long for it, but it is with the wishes of one who sees the object of his desire immeasurably above his reach. I sometimes sigh amidst my low attainments in knowledge, faith, joy, and holiness, and pant for better things; but I end as I began, in desponding lamentations, I seem forbidden to hope for improvement." Forbidden! By whom? Certainly not by God. Discouraged! Why? Let your despondency yield to the following considerations.

To those who are really anxious about this matter, the Scripture is full of encouragement. How confident is the language of Job amidst all his sorrows. "The righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger."—Job xvii. 9. Here is not only continuance but progress. "Clean hands" are designed to denote a holy life. Among the ancients they were regarded as indicative of purity of heart. Porphyry remarks that in the heathen "mysteries," those who were initiated were accustomed to wash their hands with honey instead of water, as a pledge that they would preserve themselves from every impure and unholy thing. So that the language of Job is an assurance that a holy man should become still more holy. His very practice of righteousness tends to establish him in his way, to confirm his principles, and make that easy by habit which is enjoined as duty. Piety, like everything else, strengthens by exercise.

How beautiful is the language of the Psalmist, "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree; he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing."—Psalm xcii. 12–14. The palm is indigenous to tropical and other warm climates. It grows to a considerable height and size, and presents a beautiful appearance. Its fruits, which are called dates, are much valued and are eaten both fresh and preserved, and are also pressed for syrup and wine. But it is not for its fruit alone that the palm is so valuable. From the boughs, which are yearly lopped off from the lower parts of the stem, are made baskets, bird cages, ropes, and sacks; from the leaves mattresses, sandals, &c. It is an evergreen, and lives to an extreme old age: the wood is durable and much used. How striking an emblem of a good man. He shall flourish *like the palm tree.* The cedar was considered by the Hebrews as the monarch of the vegetable world, on account of its magnitude, majesty, the number and extent of its boughs, and the durability of its wood, which was so remarkable that some supposed it to be incorruptible. Moreover every thing about the oriental cedar has a strong balsamic odor, and hence the whole forest is so perfumed with fragrance that a walk through it is delightful. Mount Lebanon was in ancient times covered with forests of cedars, of which however there are now only few remains. Again we say to the Christian, Behold your emblem. "He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon."

Similar to this representation is the extraordinarily picturesque language which we find in the book of

Hosea: "I will be as the dew unto Israel; he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive-tree, and his smell as Lebanon. They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon."—Hos. xiv. 5–7. These verses contain gracious promises of God's favor and blessings upon Israel's conversion. In the fifth verse it is described by that refreshment which copious dews give to the grass in summer. If we consider the nature of the climate and the necessity of dews in so hot a country, not only to refresh but likewise to preserve life; if we consider also the beauty of the oriental lilies; the fragrance of the cedars which grow upon Lebanon; the beauteous appearance which the surrounding olive trees afford; the exhilarating coolness caused by the shade of such trees; and the aromatic smell exhaled by the cedars; if we add to this the reviving of the corn with all the verdure of spring; and the blushing grapes pendant from the vine—we shall then partly understand the force of the metaphors here employed by the prophet: but their full energy no one can conceive till he feels both the want and enjoys the advantage of the particulars referred to in that climate where the prophet wrote. "What a glorious prophecy! How sublime, how energetic, how just! and this description is not for Israel merely after the flesh, but for the Israel of God. It may be there is a national reference, but we have lot and portion in the matter. God sets his love upon us; pours down his grace upon us; and fulfils all this to those who have faith to believe in the promise of his Spirit. It is not merely the poetic

beauty of this passage that we hold up to notice, though this is surpassingly great, and is one of those gems of composition which so profusely stud the Bible, and commend it to taste as well as to piety, but it is the promises of grace and growth which it contains for the encouragement and consolation of all God's people to the end of time.

How full of encouragement is also the language of the prophet Isaiah xl. 31.—"They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint." This beautiful passage refers primarily, though not exclusively, to the captive Jews in Babylon, and encouraged the pious among them to exercise confidence in God's ability and willingness to accomplish his promises, and to wait with patience for his gracious appearance on their behalf. But it contains a general promise of continued supplies of grace and strength to all who really desire to serve the Lord with integrity and simplicity. The image of the eagle is a very fine one, and this is not the only place where it is employed. The prophet alludes to the strength of pinion and of vision possessed by this noble bird, whereby it ascends to a lofty height, untired and undazzled, soaring even above the fogs and mists of the lower regions of the air, mounting above the very clouds, undeterred by the lightning, and floating in the pure azure above. Thus shall all who wait upon the Lord rise higher and higher, upon the mighty pinions of strong devotion and with the unblinking eye of faith, into the regions of heavenly-mindedness; and shall approach nearer and nearer to God, the sun of our spiritual day.

Then the other expressions, if less figurative, are

not less encouraging—"*They shall run*" in the heavenly race, for the crown of immortal glory,—"*and not be weary.*" Their strength, instead of being exhausted, shall, contrary to what occurs in bodily effort, be increased by exertion. No length nor greatness of labor shall be too much for them. God shall pour into their souls fresh energy for every fresh effort. They shall thus be enabled to press along the mark towards the prize of their high calling in Christ Jesus. "*They shall walk and not faint.*" Their wayfare may be arduous; the road may be long and rugged; often up steep ascents, and down into deep and rocky defiles, where every step is a labor, but they shall not lose heart or hope; they shall not swoon, nor halt, nor turn back, but go forwards, sustained by a power greater than their own.

But perhaps a plain didactic and unpoetic quotation from the New Testament, will, after all, have more weight with some minds than this profusion of gorgeous oriental imagery. What then can be more consolatory than the apostle's words to the Philippian church, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Christ."—Phil. i. 6. He will have respect to and delight in the work of his hands. He is honored and glorified by the perseverance of his people in faith and holiness, and will give all the supplies of grace necessary for the work. He loves to see his children grow in all that is excellent, even as does a wise and good earthly parent, and far more readily, will contribute all that is necessary for this purpose.

II. Dwell upon the *love and tenderness of our Lord Jesus Christ.* Let me direct your attention first of

all to that wonderfully beautiful and tender representation where it is said, "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm and shall carry them in his bosom."—Isaiah xl. 11. Now you will notice who are here represented as the objects of his care, "the lambs;" which means not only those of tender age, but of recent standing in religion. They who are young in Christian experience; and also they whose spirits are withal naturally timid, whose strength is feeble, and whose danger is great. You, you, recently brought to Christ by repentance and faith, you are the objects of Christ's special attention, care, and solicitude. You are they whom he takes up in the arms of his power, and lays on the bosom of his love. He knows your weakness, your timidity, your dangers. He directs towards you his tenderest sympathy, and will exert for you his greatest vigilance, and his mightiest power. This expression however not only conveys the idea of great care of the weak, but the exercise of that care with a view to their preservation and growth; it means not only that he cordially receives them, will provide for their safety, consult their comfort, and will accommodate his conduct to their wants, but will also nourish them through their infant existence, and rear them up to maturity and strength. You should dwell upon the exquisite tenderness of the passage—but not only upon this, but upon its intimation that he will assist you in your growth. The Good Shepherd does not wish or intend that his lambs should be always lambs; his aim is that they should be full-grown sheep, and he will leave nothing undone that this might be accomplished; and it is for this reason as well as from pity and kindness that he takes such care of them. So it is with our Lord Jesus in reference to the young convert. Let

every lamb of the flock of Christ therefore go to him by faith and prayer, and say, "Blessed Jesus, I come to thee a poor, weak, and trembling creature, doubtful of my own continuance, and alarmed at my numerous difficulties and enemies. I am but a lamb, and often fear I shall never be anything better, but perish as I am. But was it not in regard to such weakness that thou hast been pleased to utter these gracious and tender words? I believe what thou hast spoken, and will venture my soul upon it. I flee to thee as the helpless lamb to its shepherd when hungry to feed it, when pursued by wild beasts that he may defend it. Lord take me in the arms of thy power and lay me on the bosom of thy love, though I am so poor and inconsiderable a creature. I will hope in thy pastoral power and love, that I shall not only continue but grow, and that thou wilt one day rejoice in me as one of the flock which thou hast purchased with thy own blood."

III. But perhaps you may find some encouragement, even *in your own experience*, without looking to others. You are sometimes disheartened and cast down. You make little or no progress in religion. You are no wiser, holier, or happier than you were. And you fear you never shall be. You begin to be heartless and desponding. Deeply sensible of your deficiencies, you fear they will never be supplied: you feel your remaining corruptions, and have faint hopes of subduing them. You see heights above your head, which you doubt you shall never reach. In the race you are no nearer the goal, and in the conflict gain few advantages over your foes. To be as you are is your utmost hope, and not to go back your strongest effort. For you, progress is out of the question. Again I ask, Why? Only because you think so. I have referred you to the promises

of God—to the grace and intercession of Christ—to the examples of others; but now let me refer you to your own history and experience. I am supposing that you have experienced the converting grace of God; that you have really and in earnest commenced the great work of salvation; that, in short, you are not what you were. Old things have passed away, and all things have become new. And if this *be* the case, is it for *you* to doubt whether you can advance? Is continuance to be despaired of by him who has been enabled to *begin;* or *advancement* by him who has been enabled to *continue?* Have you by grace taken the mighty step, stride, bound, for it is all this, from an unconverted to a converted state, and do you doubt whether you shall go on step by step afterwards? Have you pressed through the straight gate, and shall you not be able to press forward, also, in the narrow path? Is progressive sanctification more difficult, either to you or to God than regeneration? Oh, think of all the difficulties that stood in the way when you first entered the road to glory. Recollect what you had to encounter from within and without. Have you forgotten the trembling apprehensions with which when the decision was to be made for Christ, salvation, and eternity, you doubted if it ever *would be* made? The anguish with which, on a survey of all you had to encounter, you exclaimed, "Who is sufficient for these things?" Yet it *was* made. God's grace *was* sufficient for you in this tremendous crisis of your spiritual and eternal history. And now can you doubt whether the grace that converted you can carry you forward? What! planted and not be able to thrive? Born, and not be able to grow? Started, and not be able to run? Victorious, and not be able to conquer? Will you so much disparage the grace

that has been given as to doubt its continuance, and the work it has wrought as to fear its going forward? Have you learnt no more from God's past wisdom, and power, and love, than to question whether they will help you onward in that course to which they have introduced you? Why one should be ready to suppose you would be ever full of joyful expectation and exultation too, exclaiming, "To what measure of knowledge, faith, holiness, joy, and usefulness, may I not hope to reach, since I have been translated by the power of God from darkness to light, and from the kingdom of Satan unto God?" You yourself, in what God has done for you, are a proof of what he can and will do for you if you will let him, ask him, and trust him. Cast away then, all your desponding fears, your low expectations, your unworthy doubts; they dishonor God as well as distress yourself. You are yourself the strongest proof that you *can* advance, for you *have* advanced. "He that has begun the good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." Remember the words, and enter into the argument, of the apostle, "Much more then being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life."—Rom. v. 9, 10.

CONCLUDING ADDRESS TO THE READER.

The subject—the ineffably, infinitely, eternally, momentous subject, is now before you, compared with which all other matters, even the most valuable of them, dwindle into insignificance, shrink into nothing, and fade into darkness. I

have been speaking about *progress*: but progress in what? Not in science, literature, wealth, power, fame. No. These are important—but what are they to religion? They relate to earth, this to heaven; they belong to time; this to eternity. Their value will cease at death; the value of this will then be perpetuated for ever and ever. Every step you take in this course is a step to glory, honor, and immortality; consequences hang on each step which no mind can comprehend but that which grasps infinity and eternity. You are fearfully and wonderfully placed, for you are passing through a probation which must issue in torment or in bliss which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor has ever entered into the imagination of the human mind. I have laid before you the necessity of that progress—its nature—its means—its hinderances—its mistakes—its motives—and its encouragements—which belong to true religion. By the perusal of this book you have incurred a new responsibility, and are under a more solemn weight of obligation than you were before. If you should turn back in your course you had better never have read it; or having read it would find it a mercy could you blot from your memory its contents. But this you cannot do. No water of oblivion can help you to cast into forgetfulness what you have read. Its coming into your hands will form a new fact in your existence of no small moment to you; for it will be a new aggravation of the sin and condemnation of backsliding, or a new means of growth in grace. It may be neglected and for awhile lost sight of, but it will rise up again and again, if you recede, and will meet you like a frowning specter in your retrograde path. It will follow you into eternity, to give sharpness and venom to the tooth of the never-

dying worm, and fierceness to the fire that never shall be quenched. But "I hope better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though I thus speak." The motives I have suggested will, I hope, prevail to urge, and the encouragements, I have suggested to excite you to advance. Everything you can desire or imagine that would be helpful is with you and for you. The attributes of the eternal God—the character and offices of Christ—the influences and operations of the Holy Spirit—the ministration of angels—the labors of Christian ministers—the religious literature of the age—the prayers of all good men, are with you, to aid and encourage you in your progress. Is this nothing? Is it little? On the contrary is it not much? Is it not everything? What more can you need, or can you have?

And now then let me conjure you to seek to advance in the divine life. You must not—you dare not—and I hope, by the grace of God, will not, be satisfied to be always what you are, with no more knowledge, faith, holiness, or peace than you now have. What God commanded to be said to the children of Israel—that they should GO FORWARD, is said to you, GO FORWARD. By all the authority, the commands, the promises of God—by all the love, power, grace, and intercession of Christ—by all the work of the Holy Spirit, so sufficient for your need, I conjure you GO FORWARD. By all the value of your immortal soul and all the blessings included in its salvation, I conjure you GO FORWARD. By all the pleasure of real religion now, and all the meetness it furnishes for eternal bliss hereafter, I conjure you GO FORWARD. By all the regard you have to the credit of the Christian profession and the welfare of other men's souls, I conjure you GO FORWARD. By all the solemnities of judgment—all the glories of

heaven—all the torments of hell—all the ages of eternity, I conjure you GO FORWARD. To all these arguments and entreaties, so urgent as well as so numerous, let judgment, heart, will, conscience, respond, "*Onwards, onwards*, in the path to holiness, happiness, and heaven; and then onwards, onwards, through the progression of eternal ages."

Now lay down the book, and present in sincerity, faith, and fervour, the following prayer:—

Almighty and most, merciful Father, thou delightest not in the death of a sinner, much less in the destruction of a believer; grant me, through Jesus Christ, the power of thy Holy Spirit, to follow the directions laid down in this book. Impress me more and more deeply with the necessity of progress in the divine life. Enlighten me to understand its true nature. Preserve me from all mistakes on this momentous subject. Bless to me the use of appropriate means for growth in grace. Enable me to avoid and put aside all hinderances to progress. Stimulate me by the application to my conscience and heart of all the motives here suggested, and cheer me by the encouragements which have been held out to me. Of thine infinite mercy never suffer me to draw back unto perdition, but number me with those who believe to the saving of the soul. Help me like thy holy and blessed apostle Paul to forget the things that are behind and press towards the mark for the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus; and after continual increase of grace here bring me to the eternal progression of thy saints in glory everlasting. Grant this according to the riches of thy grace, through Christ Jesus. Amen.

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